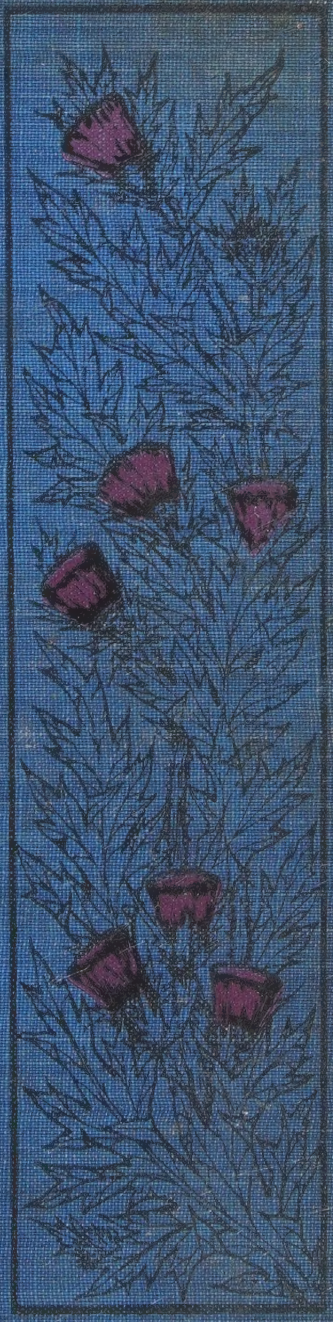
Lauder and Her Lovers



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LAUDER AND HER LOVERS

BY THE SAME WRITER.

A HIGH LITTLE WORLD	*1892.*
THIS MAN'S DOMINION	*1894.*
UNDER GOD'S SKY	*1895.*
WHEN HEARTS ARE YOUNG	*1897.*
HIS FAULT OR HERS?	*1898.*
THE HEART OF BABYLON	*1901.*

SCOTTISH MINISTERIAL MINIATURES.

LAUDER AND HER LOVERS

A NOVEL OF THE NORTH

BY

DEAS CROMARTY

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TO

THE HEART OF SCOTLAND

WHICH STILL BEATS

FOR LIBERTY AND THE IDEAL.

Coronation Day, August 9, 1902.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

ON THE SIDES OF THE NORTH 1

CHAPTER II

MISS MORAY—AND OTHERS 12

CHAPTER III

"FOR SALE—IMMEDIATELY" 28

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN FROM AFRICA 36

CHAPTER V

ASHLUDIE, ASHLUDIE! 55

CHAPTER VI

A GIRL IN A GLEN 62

PAGE

CHAPTER VII

"TO THE HALF OF MY KINGDOM" . . . 77

CHAPTER VIII

"NOW, WHO IS SHE LIKE?" 88

CHAPTER IX

"PETER'S KIRK" 98

CHAPTER X

MISS MORDECAI 109

CHAPTER XI

THE TIGHT ROPE 124

CHAPTER XII

A SURRENDER 133

CHAPTER XIII

A COUPLE OF SINNERS 146

CHAPTER XIV

THE MARRIAGE OF AMBITION . . . 153

CHAPTER XV

PAGE

DISTINGUISHED COMPANY 169

CHAPTER XVI

AN EVENING OF ADVENTURES 180

CHAPTER XVII

"ONE MUST LIVE, SOMEHOW!" . . . 203

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAIRD'S FAMILY 217

CHAPTER XIX

JUDGMENT 226

CHAPTER XX

"IN APRIL? SO SOON!" 237

CHAPTER XXI

CALLING THE GHOSTS 247

CHAPTER XXII

"A RING ON HER FINGER" 258

CHAPTER XXIII

PAGE

IN EARNEST 269

CHAPTER XXIV

"SHOES ON HER FEET" 279

CHAPTER XXV

ENCOURAGING A YOUNG MAN 294

CHAPTER XXVI

TWO PROBLEMS 313

CHAPTER XXVII

"YOUR NIECE, MUM" 320

CHAPTER XXVIII

"MISS MORAY!" 330

CHAPTER XXIX

LOVE AND LOSS 334

CHAPTER XXX

SUDDEN AND CONVINCING 343

RAIN AND SHINE

Down, down the valley came a drift of summer rain,
Down, down the valley to the sea;
And the clouds took the moisture up with gentle arms again,
When the sun sent it back to them in glee.

Up, up the valley went the sharpened easter wind,
Up, up the valley from the sea;
And the sky shone out as blue as an eye that's bright and kind,
And the birds sang together, fast and free.

Sweet through the valley came a sough of summer bliss,
Quick went a message through the earth;
And the dancing little cowslip from the primrose took a kiss,
And the ferns in the hollows came to birth.

Fair o'er the valley shone the rainbow, arching wide,
Pure were the colours each and all;
And the Promise gleamed once more on the mountain's grassy side:—
"With the storm, so the mercy still shall fall."

Down, down the valley came a glory from the west,
Up came the moon from the sea;
And the Twilight lulled the world like a child upon the breast,
Whisp'ring low of the pleasure yet to be.

D. C.

I

ON THE SIDES OF THE NORTH

A CARRIAGE and pair came out of the avenue of a mansion at the west end of Baldragon and turned toward the town. The road goes parallel with a great river which rolls down from a circle of hills; the villas of the west end command a view of these encircling heights and of the wide flat valley that spreads out below them. As one turns townwards the strath narrows, river and hillside draw near together, and the streets mount from one to the other. A cloud of smoke stains the clearness of sea and sky, but still one perceives that the old god Bel knew how to choose when he took for himself the south-lying mound above the Coire in front of the northern mountains. The sun and the wind came with him and slew the dragon, and many a wild game have they had since, over the hill-tops and the river; but another dragon has coiled itself in thick folds where Coire and sea meet, and even the great Bens, raising their heads not far off, cannot blow it away. Baldragon lies in

four miles of factory and dwelling, vomiting smoke, and overlooking the most glorious prospect given to any town in Britain.

Where the carriage came out of that avenue the scene lies open and beautiful, an inland lake, with hills cutting its edge on the south, and farm lands stretching fair between it and the northern range. The town is almost out of sight; a few embowered houses are sprinkled about. Here and there in the strath a castle may be seen among the trees. Dunwhinan and King's Crown raise themselves to look over to feudal superiors north and west, and intimate that they, too, though not "Bens," not of the greater nobility of hills, have claims and dignity, are not unknown to fame.

And so I bid you respect Baldragon and the Howe of Strathcoire. If you are unable to love the one—and, truth to tell, the trade dragon is not beautiful—you cannot fail to love the other. In fine weather, from April to November, there is charm of wood and water, of space and shadow, of corn land and heather land in the Howe, broad spells of sunshine, and air that can be like wine. There is Lauder, too—Lauder of the many sweethearts and the singular compelling grace; not a native, and yet the very daughter of the region, and as much in love with it as all its men are with her, which is saying a good deal.

She was in the carriage that came out of the avenue, and the day was the third of April. A

ridge in the west wore snow, pure white and glistering; those below had thrown it off. Along the south bank, and away in the strath, the stubble fields of last autumn were still yellow among the ploughed fields and patches of leafless wood. In the sky, battalions of white cloud rode triumphantly under the blue of heaven; westward the blue was faint and cool where snow vapour rose upon it, and the breeze blew sharply, not forgetting winter though it carried the message of spring.

Lauder had life in her to meet the life of the world. She did not mind the bite in the air. The day was good, the carriage was good, the horses were the best in the town. She had had a royal fortnight, and was now going back to bonnie Ashludie, away there on a warm terrace in front of Dunwhinan; and when summer freedom and summer pleasures were over, and the days drew in again, there would be another fortnight, or even more, of town doings and town triumphs, with who could say what at the end of them. Lauder had known winter miseries out in the country; she wore mourning yet for one of the best friends a girl ever had in this world and remembered him with a quick pang as she looked up to the house of Ashludie, which had been his, and because it was his was practically hers. Under the broad bosses of cloud a shadow lay upon it among its bare trees, though the river flowed in light. Ashludie and Sir Alec—Sir Alec and

Ashludie—that was the song to which her days were set until two years ago, and now the half of it was over and could never be sung any more. The young strength of her face took the wistful bloom that so well became it as she glanced up the valley, and the carriage turned with a soft swing along the Insch Road to the corner where one faced the wide opening of Coire to the sea, and the beacon towers on the sand-spits north and south, with the smoky mass of Baldragon clinging to its long hillside from the water's edge.

But life is life and April is April. Lauder sat straight in the carriage beside little Miss Thomson, her kind hostess; her brown eyes shone; the pucker of trouble that was apt to come in her brow was not there to-day. Simple and honest, yet with the air of Ashludie and its gallant women about her, she looked at Baldragon, and Baldragon looked at her. Every one knew Miss Thomson, the sister of the coming provost; many knew Lauder—some people remarked that John Thomson had been getting new horses and had not spared his cash on them. And then they smiled a little and bowed very politely to the young lady in John Thomson's carriage behind the splendid dark bays. He was one of the richest men in the town, and unmarried; an excellent citizen, too, who "only needed a wife," as people said.

He was at the station; had hurried away from a meeting to see his guest off; and she travelled in a compartment all to herself, with a collection of flowers and fruit, books and magazines and illustrated papers that made her look wildly rich.

"You are too good to me," said Lauder, shame-faced before John Thomson's calm, business-like arrangements, made as coolly as if he were sending goods in fulfilment of an order.

"Why not stay longer, then?" he said, "and we might try to be bad to ye. Now, have ye everything?"

He stepped back to see her trunk put into the van and fee the porter. Miss Thomson hovered, eager, and cordial, and shy.

"Tell your aunt we've been so glad to have ye, and she must be sure to come in and see us soon—and haste ye back, lassie!"

"Haste ye back!"—the kindly North dismissal—did not come from John Thomson's tongue as he grasped her hand over the window-sill. He meant to be "out the way, soon," he told her, and when she waved goodbye to Miss Thomson, it was the brother she saw, a tall, thin, sandy figure, steadily watching the train move off.

Lauder sat down and looked at her "benedictions" as she called them, and bestowed a verbal one upon somebody. I think it was Miss Thomson, who was fifty years of age and had never been anything but a plain little woman, shy and awk-

ward. "She'd rather keep a three-roomed house without a servant than live at Garth-Coire," said Lauder, singling out the chimney-stack of the Thomsons' big factory in the town mass: the villa is one of the last on the Insch Road. "And she'll near die of fright if he's made provost, thinking of the entertaining and the receptions and things. Well!"—and the next remark was not in sequence —"Auntie Bella cannot say much about me staying two days over my time, for the weather is just clearing up, and we'll get it good for the spring cleaning."

Lauder was never one to shirk a duty; and what is a woman's duty, in any ordinary rank of life, if not spring cleaning? So she was going home after sixteen days of pure dissipation, and it puzzles the faithful historian to say whether she wanted more just then or whether she did not; some points are not easily settled.

The train was the four o'clock "out from Baldragon," as people say in the Howe of Strathcoire, and—as they also say—"she's a slow ane"; she stops at all the stations between big, dirty Baldragon and lesser, poorer, but by no means inferior Insch, twenty-five miles up the valley. It is never remarked at the intermediate places that the trains come down to Insch. That would be to cast a slur on the old royal city, a thing which no one in his right mind would dream of doing. And neither do they ever speak of going

"down" to Baldragon, for they buy and sell and get gain there. "Out of" and "into" are sound, well-balanced expressions which offend nobody, and, meantime, the tide certainly goes up every twelve hours and pays its respects at Insch bridge; returning seawards, it leaves an immense vacuity of mud and sand just above Baldragon and so chastens the pride of that place. Never mind! The west end mansions are so planted, for the most part, that they never see the low tide, and, in any case, what does it matter? Baldragon has one share of the beauty of the strath, Insch has another, and neither is stinted. You may return to the Howe from many famous parts of Europe and find in spring an equal vividness, in autumn a truer promise. It is not the magnificent that is best for everyday use; not the greatest scenery that is best to live with. It is the blend of near and remote in such a way that the heart can reach to both; it is the charm which comes and goes, passing, like ourselves, through many phases, none of them terrible or overwhelming. And so, when God made Scotland, He made poets.

This is going somewhat faster than the train, which took half an hour to reach Whitehouses, the wayside station where one descends, if one is going to Ashludie or anywhere thereabouts. "Auntie Bella," otherwise Miss Moray, of the Craig, behind Ashludie, was waiting on the small platform, a middle-sized, firmly-built Scotswoman,

sandy-coloured and freckled, shrewd and resolute and well-dressed, a country dame with a touch of the town about her.

"Well, you are here!" she said. "I was across with the trap yesterday, and the day before; I did na bring it to-day. The farmer was coming; and he'll carry your box and your bits o' things. You're laden!"

Her tone was the height of good humour, cool, questioning, but satisfied with the very thing that might have annoyed her, the delay from one day to another. Lauder held the usual sort of reception on the platform—"a' the men-folk fussing about her as though they'd never seen the like," Miss Moray remarked to herself. But for once the older woman took it quite easily, even laughed in her sleeve at the station-master, tall, fatherly, and fifty; at the porter, eager, hirpling, and sixty-five; at the boy, if you please, a good third, all "making of" the lassie, with the farmer from the Mains as keen as the rest. To Miss Moray it was real curious. She had never been "made of" in her life; and to think that Lauder should be the one! However, it seemed to mean that she could marry whom she liked, and surely she would like the best-off among the lot. By "the lot" Miss Moray meant various lovers scattered through the Howe and adjacent parts.

The princess was giving gifts from her tribute: a few daffodils to the porter for his wife, a bunch

of lilies of the valley and grapes to the station-master for his wee girlie who had never run about and never would: Lauder had pangs of sympathy for creatures who couldn't run about and never knew freedom. She would have liked, for her own part, more than she could get; how terrible to have none!

"Now will that content ye?" said Miss Moray, still at the height of good humour. A person had no sooner bestowed something on Lauder than she ran to give it away where it seemed to be needed: she'd do fine with a big income and plenty to her hand. "Can we be going? Jeannie will have our tea waiting," said the aunt. She, who generally did all the managing and directing, was quite tolerent and pleased to stand about this afternoon. She made no grumble of her three days' errand to the station. Instead of provoking, it seemed to content her much. As the porter said, when she and her niece were stepping along the road, "Miss Moray's awfu' well pleased to-day." He thought he knew why, and so did the station-master, though the latter, as a responsible official in touch with the nobility and gentry, was careful not to say too much. "It's a great pity Sir Alec Moray hadna better health," he remarked. "He was a fine gentleman. And Miss Lauder's heart will aye be at Ashludie, anyway."

It lay on its terrace in front of her and her

aunt as they walked, the front quite open to the valley until May and June clothed the trees and sheltered all but the upper portion and the tower. It was like an eye looking out of the dark height and drawing one on. The road goes straight from the station to the base of the hills and crosses the burn at the quarrymen's cottages, and then forks and goes up, right and left, to villages that lie hidden away in folds of upland. The quarrymen's houses, thatched and white-washed, make a white thread along the burn, the sunset flashes on the small, square windows and dazzles the eyes of the children as they play on the edge of the stream. Lauder's special preserve lay here, with the bairns and the women, old and young; with the men, too, who, whether they were decent church members or whether they "drank"—and there were some of both—equally believed in her. School had loosed a little while before—the school at Dunragit in the rift away to the left—and the bairns were all on the road. As Miss Moray said, they scarce left Lauder a flower to herself, and old Susan, the patriarchess of the colony, had to receive a special packet of something unnamed, half-guiltily known as "your favourite, Susan—from the right shop"; and still the elder lady, who was not fond of Susan and held strong opinions on the subject of women snuff-takers and smokers, allowed herself to be in Lauder's train, and was "real pleasant" with

everybody. The farm cart passed them and went creaking round the hill to the rift where the Craig and Kilpirn lay out of sight. The near way for these places is up the avenue of Ashludie and through a corner of the woodland by rustic path and footbridge; but of course that is not every one's right. It had been Lauder's always; it had been Miss Moray's for more than twice Lauder's time, familiar as their own bit of garden in the north-running glen and dear as life itself. Lauder went first, a light, firm, young figure in sailor-hat and dark suit, her eyes on every nook and rock, each cluster of evergreen, each tree with pointing tips impatient to begin living again. There was not a foot of the way but had some memory of Sir Alec in it. Miss Moray came behind, robust in step and breath, quite fit for the climb, and for anything else that had to be done. Her eyes and thoughts were on Lauder, and she was considering and managing, as usual. People would tell you that Miss Moray was aye managing somebody.

"Your costume is gey hashed like. We must be seeing about getting a new one for ye, now the spring's in," she said.

Truly it was a miraculous afternoon. Lauder was by no means accustomed to having dresses showered upon her.

II

MISS MORAY—AND OTHERS

THE "sma' hoose" as the country-folk call it, otherwise the Craig, stands among orchard and garden at the going out of Kilpirn. From the margin of the road that winds up the ravine it looks toward the Howe, and the tower of Ashludie comes between it and the sky. When Miss Moray at the small house drew up her blind of a morning and saw the light coming in from the sea over the widespread river, the turret rose grey and still, like an image in a dream. Her eyes met it every day as if the dream hurt, and yet she would not part with it. She used to stand always a minute, looking at the conical shape rising in the blue and white clearness of Maytide, the strong warmth of July, or the quiet mist of November. Seldom was there any mist, either of autumn or winter, so thick that she could not see the steep outline of the pepper-pot above the trees against the free space beyond. Climbing timber hid the rest of the castle, and on the other side an equal height left only a peep of

the valley lying away southward; but always the grey hood of the Tower waited for her to watch it while she dressed at her dormer window in the Craig; waited for the salute of her small keen eyes the last thing at night. Ashludie—the Morays of Ashludie! You might say it was her watchword.

A younger son of the Morays of Ashludie—they are a branch of the great house in the north—had married the heiress of a wee property lying back of the Tower in the glen. That made him a laird on his own account; and though he had three sons he took care that one should succeed to the full honour, while the others were sent away to seek their fortunes. He who inherited the tiny lairdship—less than one considerable farm in the strath—had for family, as he used to say himself, three lassies, "a wild ane, a prood ane, and a peacefu' ane." The first ran away with a young doctor and vanished from sight as though she had never been; the third lived blamelessly for thirty years, giving the country-side nothing to talk about, and then, as peacefully, retired from the hollow wherein she was born. There was left the eldest, "the prood ane," to be Miss Moray of the Craig and bring up Lauder Graham, her niece and adopted daughter; her own heir and successor, as people supposed. At the castle, meantime, there was Sir Alec, who came to the title and estate as a mere baby when his father, Captain Sir David

Moray, was killed in a skirmish in India. The young widow married again out there, and left the child-laird to the guardianship of the earl and the cousin at the Craig: the villages of Kilpirn and Whitehouses assisting. He was a bit of a genius, and the manner of his upbringing suited him. All the world—of Strathcoire and a little beyond—expected him to marry Miss Moray, who was only his second cousin, and was "just made for him," a managing woman, who took after her mother's people, the Carters. If she was not to say handsome, she had a good presence, a fresh, hearty look, a couthy Scots tongue, and enough of the Moray in her to make her "carry a' thing with a high hand." That she "had any views" of Sir Alec was never said, and when he turned forty without the event coming off people concluded that he "would take Miss Lauder," who was "more chief with him" than the elder woman had ever been though she came and went and gave orders in the house. But neither did this happen, though every year made it seem, to the villages, at any rate, more desirable. Did Miss Moray intend it, or did she not? There were discussions, back and forward, about that. What Lauder thought was supposed to be an open secret written in her face and voice, her free young ways. He was "Sir Alec"; neither her brother nor her uncle nor her guardian, but a constant associate and friend, the head of her branch of the Moray clan, the

only man of literary education in her small world, barring a schoolmaster and some ministers. And Lauder had no great taste for ministers.

Sir Alec had just left the University, and taken up life as a landed proprietor when Lauder was brought home to the Craig, the pretty brown-eyed child of the sister who had eloped and was now dead. So every one understood. Miss Moray had a paralytic father and the domestic management of two houses, her own and the castle, on her hands. She let the bairn run about pretty much as it liked for several years, and it ran, frankly, after the most interesting person within reach—the young laird. He, for his part, found her a great amusement, and the gardener, Peter Campbell, fathered them both. Sir Alec's affairs, big and little, were all Lauder's and her concerns were made his. He helped her with her lessons, and she dragged him into cottars' houses, escorted him up and down the roads, broke into his quiet evenings. He taught her to read French, write verses, and keep bees. She made him talk and answer questions : things he was not much inclined to do. From being the height of his knee she came up to his elbow, a clean-stepping slip of a girl, with a quick scorn and a quick joy in her, a creature bound in a leash unconsciously, and loving it, but still—bound. She began to mother Sir Alec, tell him what he ought to do. He began to do it ; the leash was just being con-

verted into reins for Lauder's capable young hands when the old man at the Craig died, and his daughter had time to notice the state of her little world. She became a laird on her own account and took power to herself. The Craig was hers, and some rents and savings—hers absolutely. And she discovered that it was quite time Lauder went to boarding-school. The conclusion puzzled the neighbours, and may seem quite unaccountable: it was firm, and Lauder went.

To Edinburgh first, and made friends and came home for holidays, taller each time, as much in co-partnery with Sir Alec as before, though fit to tell him things which a few years ago would have seemed treason and insolence. The clan feeling in Scotland can always take the form of instructing a chief in the best way of fulfilling his duties, and Lauder continued to be an ardent loyalist while conscious that the king needed brushing up.

After a while of this, it was announced at the Craig that girls nowadays go to foreign schools and like them very much, and that Miss Moray was prepared to put her hand in her pocket in order to send Lauder abroad. "Nobody can tell what may happen in this world. I may lose all my money in a bank smash, or marry a young man in my old age," said Miss Moray. "You bude to know how to keep yoursel' if needs be." And so—angry, but excited; half bewildered and

half wild with anticipation; Lauder went to Germany, and was away two years.

Miss Moray did the mothering of the laird during that time, but she did not succeed in getting him married. He dreamed away the seasons among metaphysics and bees, writing letters on both subjects to the local papers, and rarely going beyond his own terraces and orchards unless when a hive chose to swarm down the hillside to one of the farms. Then Sir Alec, a tall, young, middle-aged man, himself pursued the emigrants and assisted in securing them. It was not for greed, that's certain. "He didn't know that he had any money," as Miss Moray used to say. It was only the last flick of the old adventurous spirit of the Morays which, for the rest, confined itself, now that Lauder was away, to following Hegelianism through intricate buzzings and hivings. A volume of essays represented the honey. It was taken off and presented to the world—that is, published—the year that Lauder left school and when it was quite time that the laird of Ashludie should be thinking of a wife—a brighter, if not less serious matter than the new Hegelianism; a particular which every one held of more importance to him than the nature of the Universal. Much more important, Peter Campbell, the gardener, declared, than taking the first prize for honey every year at the Insch Horticultural Show.

And then it began to be whispered, up and down, that he was to marry a daughter of Lord Pitroddie along the strath. Miss Moray had introduced him to the Honourable Jane, and the Honourable Jane took an interest in bees; kept them herself, or meant to. Miss Moray had a very high opinion of her, and Lord Pitroddie was for the match. Peter Campbell and his wife looked at one another when this news floated up to the terrace of Ashludie. So did various other persons elsewhere, to whom you will be introduced ere long. What did it mean? The Honourable Jane and Sir Alec! "I'll no' believe it till I see it, and I'll no' believe I will see it!" announced Peter. Nor did he. What they all saw was something quite different.

There was a great party at Pitroddie Castle one night, in the winter following Lauder's return to the Craig. Sir Alec donned evening dress and went to it, in bitter snowy weather, and caught a chill, "no' being used with the like o' thae gaieties," as Peter, or some one else remarked. The bees were frozen the same night, and Sir Alec came back with "a heavy dose o' the cauld." Nothing more. Just bothered with a cold for a day or two and sitting by a roaring fire; his consolation, not Lauder, for she was visiting in Baldragon, not the thought of the Honourable Jane, and a sense of being laid up in a good cause, but Susan Campbell, who kept Miss Moray at

length, for once, and made hot footbaths and gruel more ardently than the patient could see any need for. The doctor? Nonsense! When did he ever need a doctor? But the fourth evening the man at Mid-Ferry had to be sent for, hot hoof ringing over frosty valley to the little town by the river, then Miss Moray called from her bed in the rime of the winter morning, and a physician and nurse at mid-day from Baldragon, and in the evening Lauder, with such a look on her face as fronts the Inconceivable, when it is heard rustling. And then—then—those people who are wanted when the doctor is no use and the nurse lifts her bag again. They went to tell the bees that something dreadful had happened; the hives knew it already: the whole white valley knew it next morning, for a flag at half-mast drooped over the Tower of Ashludie.

That day was stamped deep on more than one memory. Miss Moray felt it in her bones whenever she looked out of her window at the turret, and yet she must look. Whenever she heard a knock at her door, it was like the thump that rang her out of her past that winter morning. The world had echoed ever since with things she could never speak of to any human being—questions that came up with the dawn each new day, and hung unanswered in each twilight. Who could have thought it?—so they always ended, after she had turned them over and over—who could have

thought it? Sir Alec was gone from Ashludie, and the Liverpool uncle had succeeded; he, and no other! "My Liverpool uncle, the ne'er-do-well: is it possible?" the woman said to herself a thousand times. "Would I have heeded any spae-wife who had come about me years ago and said that Sir Alec was to die a bachelor at forty-five and this auld rippet in the south was to take the title and estates? I'd have chased her from my door. And now it's happened!"

There were two years of this. Ashludie was empty; roads led no-whither. Miss Moray was always busy and grumpy, making "mournings" an excuse for silent, unneighbourly ways: "Such a change on her," people said. They "made of" Lauder, would not let her be shut up at the Craig, and the second year found her going here and there, in shabby black, with all the men watching for her, and most of the women too, and Miss Moray in the background saying to herself between closed teeth, "Maybe she'll marry some one in Baldragon with a bit of money, and then it'll no' matter." So the girl had her freedom again, if she had not much else from "auntie Bella"; but in her ears there was an echo, too, the echo of her own little laughs at Sir Alec when she came back from Germany. His dusty coats, his letters to the newspapers, his prizes for honey had been rather provoking. Honey!—When he might be going into Parliament or travelling, or something.

And why didn't he write a poem or novel about Ashludie instead of those "wholemeal" essays?

If you know the look of a wholemeal country bannock you will understand this jest. It hurt Lauder afterwards far more than it ever hurt Sir Alec. Her bits of jokes came back to her as if they had been poisoned arrows, shot from a safe place against a friend the like of whom no girl ever had before or could have again. All the old loyalty, and more, took hold of Lauder. She measured every one by Sir Alec, and they came short. They were kind and pleasant, and they made the time pass, but they were not *him.*

The girl moved through more echoes than she knew of, the woman beside her always muttering to herself: *The old man at Liverpool, after all. What does it mean? What will come of it?* But the two were at one in their passion for Ashludie, in their gratitude to the auld ne'er-do-weel for staying where he was and leaving them in charge. After him, the deluge, Lauder used to say. Auntie Bella said something quite different, which no one heard.

"She's getting the real Carter face," said Peter Campbell to his wife, "and a look in her eyes just like her mother's when the world took o'er sair a grip. I'd like to ken what Miss Moray's thinkin' aboot."

"I'm sure it's easy guessed, Peter," answered Mrs. Campbell. "She canna bear to think o' that

auld rippet, her Uncle Jamie, being master here. I think it would fell her."

"Miss Moray can stand a knock down or two; she's ane o' the strong Carter kye," returned Peter, who, being an elder of the kirk of Whitehouses, had bottom for all his opinions. "But Sir Jamie 'll no' seek to come. She said so hersel', yesterday. He's better pleased to be where he is, and gae aboot his haunts and tell everybody he's a bar'net and syne treat them to drink."

"Weel, he'll no can last long: he's an old man; and his only son died, ye ken; so when he's awa' the French heir taks everything."

"Aye, and he'll maybe come and stop here, and we'll have Papistry and dear knows what all. That's what's troubling Miss Moray, I daresay."

Peter Campbell belonged to the fringe of the Highlands, where they no longer think in Gaelic and the Lowland vernacular grips the tongue.

"She'll be glad when the day comes—Papistry or no Papistry," said Mistress Campbell quietly.

Peter was startled.

"Losh, woman! how can ye say such a thing?"

All the same he waited respectfully for the answer. His wife was ever bringing forth out of her treasury things new and old.

"I never said it before, but I've known Miss Moray, ye ken, since she and me were lassies in Kilpirn. Did ye never hear her speak o' that summer long syne when the French cousin was

here, and they were a' so happy together? Sir Alec was in his second year at Edinburgh University, and took his holidays here, and the four o' them—Miss Moray and her sister, and the two lads—had fine ploys together. Miss Moray 'll tell ye they were a' aboot ages——"

"She's five year aulder than Sir Alec if she's a day, and the earl maun have expeckit her to take charge o' the lot."

Peter had been with the earl, at Balmore, in his young days, and his tone deepened when he named the head of the clan. What this potentate "expeckit" of any man or woman should be law.

"Ough! I'm no' saying," remarked Mrs. Campbell. "Miss Moray disna' look her age, Peter, and she'd a spirit then to carry a' before her. A weel set-up woman, with the air o' the Morays about her."

"A real Carter and no' a Moray, ava'," returned the man who came from Balmore. "A' the Morays, without exception, are high-cut and jimp and genteel, and ye never saw ane o' them red in the face i' your life. The folk at the sma' house were just canty commoners, ye ken—dacent market bodies. It's well the men o' them went away."

"Losh be here, Peter! Ye forget that Miss Lauder's on that side the hoose," said the other authority.

And as Peter really had forgotten, he held

his tongue a minute. Some conversation of this sort took place often while Miss Moray meditated those questions of hers: *The old man at Liverpool—What does it mean? What will it come to?* and Lauder roamed about, waiting for the deluge, and followed by the glances of her lovers.

"There's a look in Miss Moray's face, whiles, that I canna fathom," Peter would say. "'Lossing the young laird,' do ye say? Augh, we're a' in that sorrow! But Miss Moray has some thoughts o' her ain, that have been there many a year, and they're conneckit wi' the lassie, someway."

His wife looked up. "I some think ye're right there, Peter."

"I know I'm right! I've seen it," returned the elder of the kirk. "Lauder Graham is her niece if ye like, and the only young life the place has aboot it, and a fine honest nature, forby being real bonnie to look at;—but I tell ye, the wind might carry her awa' bodily suner than it should cast down ae stone frae the Tower o' Ashludie. And that's truth!"

"Peter Campbell, ye shouldna say the like o' thae things."

"Well, ye needna repeat them, ye ken. But I can feel Miss Moray's eyes at the back o' the policies frae morning to night."

"It's no' for the sake o' meddling, though. It's just for the terrible interest she takes in the place."

"Ye may call it a terrible interest," Peter returned. "It's mair to her than her own soul, I believe."

Mrs. Campbell said "Toots!" and Peter sighed.

"Anyway, we'll never see Miss Lauder at the mansion-house now. That's no' to be!" he said.

His wife was a pale, calm, mystical woman, who smiled softly when Peter was positive.

"I wonder a man like you would dare to say that such-an-a thing is no' to be," she remarked, in the lowest of low, meditative voices. "How can ye tell?"

"Well, there's no' a lad left among the Morays, is there? The family in France is juist twa lassies. Of course, there's the Balmore folk."

"Time 'll tell," murmured Mrs. Campbell. "If you had your way there's nae doubt the affairs o' the Morays would be a new chapter o' the Bible, and Miss Lauder would hae a King Solomon sought out for her."

She sat smiling mystically while Peter derided King Solomon as altogether beneath contempt in such a connection. Lauder was as dear to her, every bit, as to him, and he knew it.

"Weel, weel, we's see. I wouldna like the world to beguile her."

"It winna!" said Peter, in a tone of deep conviction. "She's a fine lass!" And then he went to his greenhouses. In his soul there was a prayer for the lassie—"My lassie," he was wont

to say to himself. She seemed more his and his wife's than Miss Moray's.

One day the old man in Liverpool died, the cousin in France succeeded, and, behold! Mrs. Campbell's words came true. A wonderful change passed over Miss Moray. A burden seemed to fall from her shoulders, a cloud from her brow and eyes. "We've got a head of the family again," she said. "It makes a big difference!"

It did indeed seem to make a difference. She renewed her youth and became a Miss Moray of many years past whom Mrs. Campbell had almost forgotten and Lauder had never known. She was genial, she was talkative, she won back an old popularity which had vanished. She began to make calls again and to give invitations in the old hospitable country way, and every one heard that "our cousin, Sir Victor," might be expected some day—possibly next autumn for the shooting—and it was a real mercy there was a clever man to guide the estate, so that a woman need not be troubled. That was the right way of things, and one could not be thankful enough. She was curiously emphatic on these points. You would have thought, to hear her, that she hated business and had no idea of ruling a factor. The factor's opinion did not run that way, nor did Peter's, nor anybody's—and they wondered. Nevertheless, it was plain that some deliverance was felt. No one could doubt it.

"We shall have the laird here a great deal by-and-by; perhaps altogether," said the mistress of the Craig. She wrote him long letters—she, who hated letter-writing—and he replied at some length. She was going to see the castle cleaned and made comfortable from top to bottom for him and his daughters—he was a widower—and then let them only come and be welcomed and feasted! Apparently, it was what she had lived for all these years.

III

"FOR SALE—IMMEDIATELY"

THE primrose buds were peeping along the woodland paths when Miss Moray and Lauder went round, in the April morning, to the mansion-house, to arrange for the great cleaning, and the first faint odour of growth was in the air. The birds were nesting and quarrelling; on the terrace the snowdrops twinkled, the crocus petals lay about in the sunshine. The masses of lilac were tipped with little leaf bunches and the strong shoots of the chestnut-trees, yellow and red and green, were sticky with resin, as though a painter had been over them. The chestnut is a confiding tree—so vigorous in the push of its new life, so tender in the green leaf that meets the east wind. Those at Ashludie have some reason for their confidence, the sunshine lying about their roots and the great flanks of hill sheltering their branches; and they were full of lusty points exuding sap. Lauder walked about and looked at them; at the brown-green lances of lily of the valley crowding up in shady corners,

the daffodil shoots and the leafy clumps of bourtree by the side door. The time of rowan and birch and the greater people of the forest was not yet, but laurel and rhododendron were all alive with long narrow buds, and the service-trees were tipped on every hardy twig. Familiar things, long loved and country bred, prinked themselves all about, and Peter Campbell and his men were preparing beauties of a more striking sort for bed and border. By-and-by the terrace would blaze with colour in front of the quaint old "castle," and the rose garden on the west would be a dream within a dream. Then the French cousins would come and bring laughter and song, dancing on the terrace—roses gathered for the great china bowls, plenty of use for the fruit in the orchards and the vegetables that Peter Campbell diligently cultivated. There would be Life at Ashludie. It was about time.

Miss Moray was going from room to room indoors, regretting that she had no instructions about painters and other decorators whom she might have let loose on the first floor at least. However, that could be done some day, and, after all, the reception-rooms had a style of their own, not unlike a French chateau. Besides, there were the Stewart relics, a glory in themselves. She proceeded to the second floor, the low-pitched, uneven-floored sleeping-chambers, set full of awkward old furniture which it was a thought to any

housekeeper to move. The stairs and passages are many and twisty, but Mrs. Campbell stepped patiently after. As she said, inwardly, she "needed nae directions," being a martyr to her own domestic instincts, and, forby, the factor, for reason known to himself, was against any upsets just then. However, Miss Moray arranged everything as usual, and Mrs. Campbell said, "Yes, mum," at intervals. From the window of a little dressing-room in the turret they saw Lauder, straight and slender, in old black serge and sailor hat, standing on the slope of grass and looking eagerly at the irregular front of the house, with the collie beside her, and behind her young figure the falling lands, the length of strath and seeming far-away line of the south hills, the soft grey and white clouds. Miss Moray did not call her in. Let her go her own way. If Lauder were to be pleased you must give her a lot of freedom. Well, let her take it, meanwhile. She would have the more time to think of John Thomson and the great advantage of a good position in Baldragon. As for the house, Miss Moray felt equal to anything, single-handed. She was "at the height o' her satisfaction," as Mrs. Campbell silently expressed it.

The factor came up the yew-tree avenue and as he stopped beside Lauder and spoke to her —evidently about some arrangement—it seemed to Miss Moray, looking from the window of the

patchwork-room, that she all at once saw a thing, actual and real, which had been only a thought before, haunting the background of life. And it was a thing she never wished to see. "Na, na, it's a providence as it is; a real providence, I'm sure," she said to herself, and hurried down to hear what it was the factor had to say—what had brought him round just now. Mrs. Campbell was left speaking on the subject of the sacred patchwork—quilt, bed-hangings, and curtains—the achievement of a Miss Moray who sewed a love-story into them in the earlier days of the century and left them as a monument to name a room. Mrs. Campbell looked down from between the curtains and saw the present Miss Moray step across the grass and Lauder smile at the factor. He was one of her sweethearts, of course, and it seemed just the order of nature to Mrs. Campbell. Only nature, or somebody—did Mrs. Campbell say "providence" too?—had not arranged other things to correspond.

She stood watching. She had "known Bella Moray a' her days," and her mind went back to that summer when there were three sisters, co-portioners for the Craig. If cousin Victor had known that after a while there would be only one, would it have made any difference? If Bella Moray was not quite "ages," should that have counted? Mrs. Campbell asked these questions at the window of the patchwork-room, along with

others which to her were far more important and not so easily answered. They were in Miss Moray's mind as she crossed the grass to speak to the factor, who was just a joiner in the village, a mere handy man in her eyes.

"Well, Sandy, what's your errand to-day?" said the lady, as full of business as if she had the management of half the strath. Sandy Blair's face seemed to indicate that he had not expected to meet her at the mansion-house. "He'll be coming for potatoes to his dinner," thought she. "The place needs more guiding than it gets. But there's a providence in things." Then aloud, "Weel, Sandy?"

"Ye'll have no word this morning, Miss Moray?"

"I'm not expecting any word, specially, but if ye're needing instructions I could write."

"Oh, I could write mysel' for the matter o' that! As I was saying yesterday, there's nae hurry to do anything about the place. It's early yet."

Lauder was conversing with the collie, who had a good share of her affections. He thought that love should always run to biscuits, and she was explaining that sometimes it couldn't. The collie was disappointed, and from something in Sandy's look and tone Lauder expected some disappointment for auntie Bella also. "I have word from Edinburgh," the factor was saying. "Ye'll not have seen *The Scotsman* to-day, Miss Moray?"

"It never comes to me till the evening, ye ken,"

she answered. Her colour suddenly altered. "Why d'ye ask, man? What's your news?"

Lauder pushed down the dog. A pucker of trouble came into her brow. From the square window of the patchwork-room Mrs. Campbell looked upon the scene.

"Oh, there's nae death, Miss Moray! Ye need na alarm yersel'. Of course, I'm aware ye'll no' be pleased; neither you nor Miss Lauder, here. For my ain part, I've been expecking something o' the sort."

As he went on, slowly and unwillingly preparing the way for some announcement, Lauder's brow wrinkled up, her hand sought the collie's head again. Over Miss Moray's face there came the unpleasant pallor of a sandy-coloured, freckled skin. A stern woman, with hard mouth and eyes, she set herself as men do in a surprise of war. Had she also been expecting, or half-dreading something, far within herself, where even her own consciousness did not reach?

"If there's no death, what are ye havering about?" said a voice that no one seemed to know. Sandy Blair answered with gentle civility.

"I'm feared there's nae haverin' i' the matter, Miss Moray. Ashludie is adverteezed."

The hand on the dog's head turned so cold that he looked up with side-long eyes and whimpered. The figure to which the hand belonged stood perfectly still.

A strange look of age came over Miss Moray's face. No one had ever seen her like that—a scared, time-beaten woman, glaring at the factor, like a clansman in a deadly thraw. "I'm no' caring to hear tales, Sandy Blair: the house is to see to, and ye'd better be arranging for the repairs in the back court."

She made as if to go indoors, but hardly moved. The factor looked away from her. At this moment he feared what might happen to Miss Moray. Lauder's eyes, coming back from the front of the dear old house, from the rose-garden, and the great protecting hill and all the corners and familiar quaintness, demanded of Sandy Blair if this could ever be "adverteezed" like common things which no one loved. "It's horrid of him to let it!" she said. "We shall perhaps be shut out. If he had ever seen it he couldn't!"

She shivered. The best of the day was over with the gleam of morning sun, and the clouds had changed their aspect. They hung grey and lumpy over the river; a mist came up from the sea. The factor took a letter out of a pocket.

"I'm awfu' sorry, ladies, but I have my orders, and ye can see for yourselves. The place is no' to let, Miss Lauder."

Her brow opened again out of its trouble.

"Then what do you mean, Sandy? I thought there was some mistake!" Miss Moray had opened the letter. It fell from her hands and

she seemed to waver on her feet. Then she turned and went slowly towards the house. "Sandy!—Sandy! what does it all mean?" cried the girl.

He was a cool, plain man, but the Scots soul is tuned to all emotions of home and race and kindred. It gleamed wistfully in his peasant face as he answered her:

"It means, missie, that Ashludie is for sale—immediately!"

IV

THE MAN FROM AFRICA

A MORNING as brilliant as April, in the north, can achieve had dawned on Edinburgh, and the stream of city life was just beginning to pour along Princes Street. It is a boulevard which Paris and Vienna may outshine but cannot rival, an avenue between an old time and a new one, with history and imagination for its two-fold charm, and the north-east wind for its breath; with crag and castle, shops and hotels, classic art and ecclesiastical Gothic all piled together; while, in the midst, one of the world's three great wizards watches from his marble the city in which he used to walk as a man of business. The air is full of memories, of ozone, of dust, of noise; the sun strikes through the mist on the Forth and the broken headlands about Queensferry; Inchgarvie looks like a new-painted Dutch toy set out to dry. The great crags stand up bare and weird over the chimneys like a desert wall fencing the city; the Greek lines on the Calton pierce a sky that in May and June can be as blue and

keen as that which overhangs the Acropolis; beyond the New Town the estuary glitters, and in the south the Pentlands march away to meet the Borderland. There is no city to match with it, nor ever will be:—railways and religion, Romance and the Usual, Carrubbers' Close and Robert Louis Stevenson, slums in eight floors of tenement, gentility in five, trade in luxuries and trade in wire-pulling—it is Edinburgh the beloved and the reviled, possessor of the greatest charm and the greatest conceit in Christendom. And whatsoever is born of Edinburgh is *right*, be it what it may.

The breakfast-table was set in the hotel Lochinvar and one end of it stood near the window which looked across to the fine red pile of the Allan Ramsay buildings. If you can think of a more fascinating scene on a fine spring or autumn day, I'll thank you to mention it. Meanwhile, and in my ignorance, it's good enough for me. It was good enough, that April morning, for the man who had arrived from Liverpool the night before. As soon as he came into the long room he went to the street end—went straight and steady, with an air of decision, though his step was really slow. He was sixty; square built, rather heavy; not the sort of man to rush anything, yet accustomed to reach his end for all that.

His face had a pale sallowness of a peculiar sort which meant, if any one had known, or cared

to know, that the gentleman in the rough checker suit must have lived a long time where there was malarial fever, and plenty of it.

He gave a glance to the scene outside—you might have said an uninterested glance if you had been one of the few persons who looked up from their breakfast to appraise him. His was a measured, momentary glance, and then he sat down, said "Porridge!" to the waiter, and was so anxious to see a *Scotsman* that he sent out for one, all to himself, the hotel copy being engaged. When it came, and his breakfast with it, he turned neither to the political nor commercial news, but to the page on which property for sale was advertised. This he folded outwards, and, propping the paper against a jug, studied with small, colourless, intent eyes, while dipping a big spoon first in the platter of porridge, then in a small bowl of milk. Blindly, cautiously, the spoon went to the right places, and came up to the big, ugly—yes, it was ugly—Fife mouth; the eyes never left the newspaper. There was no one in his immediate neighbourhood to be inconvenienced by this arrangement and he evidently had no care what was thought of it. The shoulders bent squarely, the mouth closed on spoonsful of porridge and—a purpose.

As he sat there, the very image of a business man absorbed in his own affairs, and used to knocking about in places less civilised than Edinburgh, nobody could have supposed that a

romance was in progress. Elderly and heavy men don't have romances, do they? Even the clever lady a little way down the other side of the table missed the opportunity. In her meanderings among hotels and boarding-houses—which were continual, and left her as unmarried as they found her—she was in the habit of allotting a vast amount of interesting experience to persons who were quite innocent of it. She could look at few faces, man's or woman's, without seeing some history which had never happened. This morning she glanced at the man from Liverpool as briefly as he had looked at the Mound, and decided that the bald round head in front of the newspaper had not a grain of sentiment in it. The plain, badly dressed owner might be capable of seeking a useful wife through the medium of a matrimonial advertisement: nothing more romantic than that, to judge from appearances. More likely he was seeking an investment. "As hard as nails," said the clever lady. "Looks as if he had buried three wives and wanted a fourth as nurse-housekeeper. And every one of them had money of her own, I've no doubt!"

She was writing a story, of course—every one "writes," except those who neither write nor read —and she made a mental catalogue of the features above the checker suit. They were quite the right thing for *A Brute of a Man* whom she was going to develop, and carbon-process, and exhibit in

the very strongest shades known to a certain school of woman's photography. She passed him the marmalade in order to hear him speak. It doesn't go with porridge, of course, not even when you are a tourist in Scotland, but he might have thanked her all the same. He did not so much as see the attention, and his photograph suffered accordingly. It was a very dreadful sketch when it appeared, and she always declares it to be taken from the life.

For him—he had no thought of what was being done to him, no thought of his few fellow-travellers, or even, just then, of Edinburgh, though he had never seen the famous city before. He was reading and re-reading a close-printed paragraph which ran thus :—

"Desirable Residential Estate.

"To be sold by Public Roup, within Dowell's Rooms, George Street, Edinburgh, on April 30th, at two o'clock, afternoon (unless previously disposed of by private bargain) :—

"The very desirable residential estate of Ashludie, situated in the parish of Kilpirn, six miles from the town of Insch, and not more than three from the station of Whitehouses on the Insch and Baldragon line. The estate consists of about 3,000 acres, whereof 1,500 are arable, and the remainder rough pasture and woodland. The mansion-house is of historic interest, and has many relics of the Stuarts and the Jacobite risings. It occupies a fine situation, sheltered on the

north, and overlooking the whole of Strathcoire, and is in good repair. The entire furnishings, pictures, and curiosities, may be taken on valuation, if desired. The farms on the estate are——"

And so on. It was set forth as a particularly tempting thing for any gentleman who wished to possess a compact Scottish estate, suitable for residence all the year round and conferring on its owner, if not the actual dignity of old family and station, then the next thing to it. The man from Liverpool did not need to have this enlarged upon. He knew what it meant well enough; he even knew something of Ashludie itself, in a dim way. The name, in the advertisement, sent a little start through him when he came to it. Ashludie, in Strathcoire! What did he know about the place? He glanced up for a moment, as one does when a question presents itself, though for sure, the answer is not at hand. He glanced over to the Mound, vaguely, and it was just then that the clever lady pushed the marmalade towards him. He saw neither it nor the Mound, neither the red-stone gables of one building high in the morning light, nor the cool, dry, reserved perpendicular of another. What he saw, with the small, colourless eyes that peered out of folds of pallid flesh, was something very different, very far away. Never mind what he knew. His eyes went back to *The Scotsman*. He had never dreamt of such a chance as this, and at the

very start, too! The possibilities for a purchaser of Ashludie were plain to any one who knew the ground at all. A fine compact old lairdship like this, connected with a great family and within easy reach of two important towns—for if Insch lay nearest and baronets of Ashludie had once been provosts of that burgh, the larger and no less ancient town of Baldragon was not far off, "he might be thought o'—a man, there!" was what the big mouth said, without the least stir of the lips, while the eyes above—eyes that seemed scarcely to see—scanned the newspaper. The reader went over that advertisement six times at least.

Something beat quick in his breast. How long was it since he went to "the Coast" and began to gather a bit of money, trading for other men, up an African river, and then, setting out on his own account, with another lad for partner, began to fill the dark evenings and the steaming heats with a scheme of which he never spoke to any human being, for which he toiled, silently, remorselessly—how long? Thirty and five years. So long does a dream take. And yet luck had come to him, come early. First the great good luck of being able to stand the climate and to get on with the darkies, and then other strokes, or bits of fortune. One of these, perhaps, was not, strictly speaking, "luck" at all: he never felt quite sure about it; but anyway, he had known how to do

business—a pretty ticklish sort of business—and he thought the money was tolerably clean, all things considered. He had not been bad to the black folk, certainly not, nor—nor to anybody! . . . He looked up suddenly from the newspaper and almost said, "No, sir!" out loud. Then back to the advertisement again and the long dream that seemed to be coming true at last, coming true with startling rapidity at the long last. He was going to buy an estate!

To return to the old country and have land of his own and be a proprietor, a good, kindly proprietor, encouraging every plan for the benefit of the people, that was the purpose on which his mouth had closed ever since he left the Wilson factory for Jones Co., he being the Co. Jones, poor lad, went out of it very soon by the way of bilious fever, and James Rattray worked on as very few get leave to work on the West African Coast and the rivers.

"Get leave." It was his own native phrase; it came spontaneously as he went back on the past, and everything seemed wonderful. A dream is never so unreal as when it begins to come true. James Rattray glanced along the hotel table from which the strange people were going, one by one, to their business or their sauntering; he looked through the window and caught the sun-glint on the rose-red gables and balconies above the, as yet, leafless trees. A military call sounded from

the castle on the rock, and the rush of the long street grew louder as the regiment of commerce flocked by. Rattray stood up suddenly. Yes, the great day had arrived! He was here, his pile made, his opportunity even waiting him. He grabbed the newspaper and cut out the advertisement with his penknife and put the slip carefully away in a bankrupt old pocket-book which barely held together within a strip of something once called black elastic. Then the gentleman in the checker suit walked out into Edinburgh and sought the office of a Writer to the Signet who "held the title-deeds and articles of roup." Of course he was there far too early.

"Yes"—he said, in reply to certain suave commonplaces from the lawyer which were not without design, either—"yes, I want a property—a nice old place that I can settle down to and manage."

"Well, I have no doubt we can meet your views, if you will give us a little time," said the writer, a tall, thin, smooth-speaking gentleman, who folded his legs and his hands and looked like a long clip for documents. He had no idea that there was the least hurry. Indeed, haste is improper in law and land; there should always be a margin of a few years to come and go upon. "We shall be pleased to act as your agents. You have been abroad for some time?"

"On the Kawa River for over thirty years; and I haven't done badly, I'm thankful to say. Kept my health wonderful and come home as strong as ever I was."

"Ah, the African trade!" The lawyer watched him closely.

"Yes. It's a queer kind of life out there, as you may suppose, and I went into it for all it was worth, in a decent kind of way, ye ken; kept up nae correspondence and worked real hard and always looked forward to—to——"

"Ending your days as a landed proprietor?"

"Aye, aye! Just that—just that!" The Fife voice was unmistakable; the way it took the vowels, the deliberate breadth of the speech.

"You've kept your Scots tongue," said the lawyer, smiling.

"I daresay. I'm a self-made man. Began as a shoeless loon in a village north there"—nodding his head in the direction of the Forth,—"went to Glasgow with a small bundle, and then disappeared and was understood to have 'gone through it some way.'" A half-smile stirred the heavily shaped face at this; it altered the whole look very much, and pleasantly. He went on, explaining himself a little to a person who would naturally want to know something about him.

"It's gey strange when I look back on it. I thought I might manage to do something, but

I've done more than I thought. And now I expect I'm forgotten by my own brothers, supposing they're no' gone to a farther country than even I've come from."

"You're alone in the world?"

"You may say so, meantime. But I'm used to being alone in a teeming land; it's second nature, now. Forby, when I've a place I'll make friends, or Scotland is not what it used to be."

The lawyer gave a faint grin. He was not destitute of humour—few of his race are—though his existence among documents hardly permitted of giving rein to that faculty. "Well," he said, "if you are a millionaire we can put you in the way of a large sporting estate in the north—deer forest, grouse moor, all the usual thing."

The man in the checker suit nodded. He seemed to know the "usual thing."

"Or there is a place in the west—really a very fine property, and it is likely to go a great bargain. You would have a whole island to yourself, and a mansion-house that holds more people than there are in the village. There's a pier; and a yacht goes with the rest. The present tenant had a very distinguished party last year, and he is a nobody."

"O'er big for me—that," was the brief reply, disposing of yacht and pier, island and mansion-house, in one brief phrase. "I'm not terrible ambitious, and I'm no' just to say a millionaire

I want to enjoy myself and see a few folk about me."

"Nothing easier, if you have the means. It seems to require a lady to be sure——"

"I'll get the lady when I want her," interjected the man from the Kawa River.

"She is not absolutely necessary, however," continued the suave and clever lawyer, watching his man, noting every sign. "People will go anywhere to anybody nowadays, if they are well entertained. It's entirely a question of putting yourself in good hands and finding the wherewithal, and the old properties are falling into the possession of you commercial gentlemen all over the country."

"I'm not for a big thing," repeated the large solid mouth. "I can put about forty thousand into land, and if the placie you're advertising to-day pleases me, I'll tak' it."

The Fife tongue gained on him as he went on. He took the conveyancer's breath away. Never had a Writer to the Signet such a cool, assured client to deal with as this heavily built, deliberately moving, rapidly deciding man from Africa. He brought out a bankrupt pocket-book and a newspaper cutting, with various guarantees of character —the sort of character which the purchaser of an estate needs to show—and reiterated quite calmly that if the placie pleased him he would tak' it.

He said he was not a millionaire. He ought to possess two or three millions to use language

like that! The fine old Ashludie property, which for interest and situation ranked with some of the greatest of its neighbours; Ashludie, which really ought not to be in the market—this trader in palm oil and rubber and ivory, with a matter of sixty or seventy thousand pounds, perhaps, wrung out of the blacks (and leaving the devil to be paid by the British Government, some day, when the rifles came to be used) he would "tak' it," would he? Well, one must meet all sorts of clients in a legal day, and Ashludie had to be sold to somebody, more was the pity; but the Writer scorned to unfold himself, in any sense, for this sort of thing. He rang for a clerk to bring plans and maps; they were laid on the table, and James Rattray sat, square-shouldered, hands on knees, looking at them, hearing the respectful patter of the clerk as if it were a sound in a dream. The thing seemed all right—"suitable enough," he remarked; and then in reply to something:—"Upset price? Well, I've had *The Scotsman* sent out to me regular these ten or twelve years past, and ye ken ye dinna always get the upset price. Whiles ye've to re-expose the lot and take less. But I'm not after a bargain. It's for my pleasure, this."

"And if it happens to be some other man's pleasure, and he with a few thousands more in his pouch, he may heighten the price on you. Of course you'll consider that.—Show the photograph of the house, Wilson."

That would impress the man from the Coast, he said to himself, and it did.

"Eh, that's fine! I like that!" said Rattray with a burst.

"I daresay. It is a most *desirable* property," remarked the lawyer with dry emphasis, "and would not be in the market at all only the succession has passed to one who is domiciled in France and has daughters to portion. He has little interest in the place, and rather than keep it up and let it, prefers to sell—stock, lock, and barrel, as the saying is. We expect that it will tempt some gentleman who intends entering Parliament. Our client will sell whole or not at all, you understand—furnishings, family treasures, and all. It is a very unusual opportunity of its kind, in a quiet way. A good deal of modest entertaining could be done at Ashludie, and the Stuart relics are very interesting."

Privately he was sure this man could not want the heirlooms of the Ashludie Morays. Something more ordinary would serve his turn.

And the man himself was thinking as much. What was it he proposed to do? That turreted front, that fine terrace raised above the park, that hill of wood, climbing to the sky, that air of dignity and long honour—they were beyond anything he had dreamt of. A plain square house, with the sheep feeding up to the door and a potato and cabbage plot at one side, was the notion

he cherished "out there" and came home with. He had pictured to himself, always, a strait box of three stories and eight flat windows not over big, the typical mansion-house of a Fife or Forfarshire village. He surely did not think of planting himself in a castle!

Well—he did! If the castle could be had, he would tak' it. He promptly and for ever dismissed the image which had sustained him for a score of years—dismissed it with contempt, so ungrateful are we to our best helps, and Ashludie slid into his heart.

"I'll go and see it. How do I get there?" he asked, rising and putting away his pocket-book with the air of a man who takes possession of his own. The agent intimated that he would send word to the factor to show the house and boundaries.

"To-morrow, or next day, perhaps? There's no hurry, you understand; we can wait for a good offer, and the title is unimpeachable."

"There's nae need for a factor, blethering. I'd rather be myself," answered the man from Africa quickly. "And I'm going this afternoon. There are folk in the castle, I suppose?"

He called it "the castle" deliberately.

"Oh, certainly!" A most emphatic person, this.

"Well, ye can give me a line to whoever's there and bid them let me alone to take a look round. If I need the factor, I'll get him; and I'll see what I want to see, and syne I'll wire ye."

His Fife tongue seemed to get nearer its roots with each sentence. He took his hat and stood waiting for "the line."

"Very well, Mr. Rattray; very well." The agent resigned himself and consented to let the man do business in his own way. "There are caretakers at the Tower, worthy people—head gardener and housekeeper. I will give you a card, and you can take the eleven-thirty train to Insch. Then you had best drive; the days are on the short side yet."

"I'll see. I may take the other line and walk over and look about me as I go."

"Well, Ashludie lies full in view, and the very dogs about the country-side will know it. You are on the property as soon as you get out at Whitehouses, and it runs to the hills."

"'It runs to the hills,'" repeated the man from the Kawa River. "Have ye any offers in your hands for the place?"

It is hard to take an Edinburgh lawyer unawares; yet he almost did it.

"Well, the advertisement is only in for the first time to-day. But there may be some one else home from foreign parts who—who is quick at making up his mind, Mr. Rattray."

A queer, subterranean smile arose somewhere in the man from Africa. He could enjoy having dealings with this agent. The latter went on:

"The upset price, as I mentioned, is thirty-eight

thousand. We made it very low to induce competition."

"Yes, aye. Well, you'll likely hear from me, one way or another, in the evening."

"'In the evening?'" repeated the agent. Once more the man surprised him.

"Aye. There'll be a telegraph at the station, of course, and I'll wire to your house if ye'll give me the address."

"Very well, Mr. Rattray; very well! I should wish you to pay particular attention to the interior of the house. The portraits of the Moray family——"

They were at the door of the outer office, the client just going out, the lawyer attending upon him with sufficient respect, for, after all, the present owner of Ashludie wanted money to portion his daughters, and it is not every one who will buy stock, lock, and barrel.

"The portraits of the Moray family," the lawyer was saying. James Rattray turned.

"They're Murrays, are they?" he said.

"Moray," corrected the other. "A branch of the Drumour family, which, again, is a sept of the Balmore clan. If you remember your calf country you'll know what that means." He thought that he saw an inquiry or a hesitation in the large sallow face. Perhaps this person from abroad began to realise that he was dealing with important matters.

"Moray," repeated the home-comer in a low

tone, with something of surprise in it—though why should he be surprised? "I'd clean forgotten that they came east of Insch. A branch of the Drumour family? Aye, aye! And there'll be other branches, no doubt?" He seemed to search the lawyer's face in passing, but the light at the office door was not abundant. "*The Morays*," he said, and went out into the grey energy of Edinburgh.

"It's a particularly interesting property," said a voice after him, like a record office speaking.

"But what does he care? He doesn't take it in," thought the agent, and, respectable Writer to the Signet as he was, and an elder in "Free Saint Cuthbert's" (which is the seventh heaven of the Unimpeachable), he never uttered such a lie in his life. James Rattray took it all in, and kept it. "They are Morays, are they?" he was saying to himself as he went to the station. "Great folk, the Morays, though some o' them may sink in the world, whiles." And again, "I remember fine what he said. He was one of them." Then he put away that little recollection and hugged his own joy to his breast. What a great wonderful day this was to him! How the Firth danced, white-capped, gay-footed, to the sea, as if all the youth in the world had run down to it! How the clouds and the breeze chased each other across the great hills and the fair strath of central Scotland, with the Rock of

Stirling and the Abbey Craig holding guard there for the old free spirit! No Scot can ever believe that the soul of his land is dead while those two trusty champions sit on either side the Forth, looking west and north and south, and the flag-pole of Bannockburn peeps above the trees. James Rattray rode through the fields, under the Ochils, and saw the misty ring of giants in the west country, and came to Insch lying in its own nest beside the Coire, and all the way he hugged himself and a name.

ASHLUDIE, ASHLUDIE!

SOME hours later James Rattray did more than hug himself. By that time he was a man possessed and scarcely able to refrain from shouting. A flush had come to his sallow paleness, his hand shook. There had been some very unexpected moments, and a thrill in each. There had been hours which seized him and made him their own. He was not the same man who rose to breakfast that morning in the hotel Lochinvar and took his first glance at Edinburgh. The morning? It was years ago! First glance? He had looked into a world and become part of it since then.

There was the moment when, on the straight road from the station he caught sight of the house, looking out of the big hillside, so quiet, as if watching for some one, but so dignified and sheltered—not for everybody's approach. And the fields where the ploughs were going and the strong horses laboured in deep clay furrows

seemed to set a guard about it, as much as the enclosing height.

There was the moment when he came to a little lodge, beyond a string of white cottages—it was no more than a cottage itself—and, half-afraid and bashful, ventured to pass between two quaint old gate-posts and go up a winding avenue. "Lodge"—"avenue"—old dreams, and here was he in the midst of them.

Then a small iron gate, a few rustic steps, and a yew-tree lane—evidently a short cut. He chuckled to himself as he took the short cut and mounted the path. All at once there was the house before him, in sweet shelter of old trees and shrubs and ivied walls, a conical tower rising against the hill, a low, nail-studded door in the centre, with a balcony above it. He stood on the farther edge of lawn and flower-bed and lifted his hat to Ashludie.

That was a moment he would never forget.

Later on, he marvelled at his own madness. He had been through the house in its length and height—a simple affair, after all, but he thought it great. He had seen "blue" and "green" and "yellow" rooms, dining-hall and with-drawing-room, had viewed the cabinets and curiosities, the pictures, and the old armour in that delightful nook between the oaken door and the foot of the staircase; and it seemed to him that no human being could ever remember all the turns of stair

and passage by which he had gone up and down, though, indeed, his guide, a thin, pale, quiet woman, seemed to know them as well as she knew the whole Moray history, which also bewildered him. It dropped out in little bits, and made him feel small and poor and common. Did he actually think to call himself the laird of a place like this; to shove himself in among the traditions of an old family and make himself at home under the eyes of all those Morays on the walls—judges of "the Court," colonels, governors, dames and young beauties, with here and there a Stewart prince among them? It certainly seemed "daft-like," but he held on; he would be daft in just that way.

The woman did not speak much. She was watching him, he knew, as the people at the station had watched him, taking his size with side-glances. He was doing the same, for the matter of that, and after he came, they would go on doing it for a year or two, more or less. It was the old style—his own—and he understood it. Servility, "claiking" would have bothered him. He followed Mrs. Campbell up all the stairs and into all the corners, marvelling at the speed he could make, and mightily impressed with the clean order of the whole place. To a man from the Kawa River it seemed preternatural, but heavenly. He would have it kept just like that, from top to bottom, and go round and look at it—lose himself in it.

Then Peter came on the scene and marched him, dourly, through garden and orchard and the out-stretching square of back places, stables, and so forth, the remains of a day when Ashludie had comings and goings, and kept company.

"It's not to say splendid," said Peter, the grizzled Grampian man, in his best hill voice. "I come from Balmore, myself: the earl's place, as ye may be aware. But the Morays here were the real stock, and keepit their way among the best till the Fifteen and the Forty-five crippled them. And it's as bonnie a place as ye'll see in broad Scotland."

Peter was just talking to pass the time. As well this man as another, if so it must be.

"But it's an awful pity when a fine branch dies out," he said.

They had come back to the terrace, and the afternoon sun was still warm on the space within the sheltering folds of hill, though an east wind was sending the smoke of Baldragon up in a stain upon the April of the sky. James Rattray sat a few minutes, breathing himself and cherishing a joy too deep for the shouting he had felt inclined to a while ago. He planted his hands on his knees and shut his mouth tight, and his eyes looked steadily, with small fixed gaze, over the quick fall of the park land, over the farms and a wee roadside clachan or two in the middle

of them. No more factory for him, on that steaming river far away; no more wondering if a dream would ever come true, no more notions of a better-most farmhouse and the sheep feeding up to the door. Luck beyond all he had imagined had fallen to him; and now he would just try how much good it was possible for a man to do who was no saint but meant well. A flight of birds went suddenly overhead and flashed into the wood. They carried something like a prayer with them from lips which had not often prayed but had promised for twenty years to "do good with the money." Always that, every night, in the factory, while the African surf cannonaded along the coast, and the traders and missionaries lay like a few white flies on a continent of darkness. Always that, on the journeys up river, when the steamer lay-to in a Hades of a forest, slab with life and night, and a man asked himself what he was there for. Always his answer to his own soul was, "I'll do good with the money. —I'll go home and find a way, if God will stand by me." The old Jacob bargain was never more sincerely made.

And surely God had stood by him—had brought him to this place—would give it now into his hand, so that he might keep his word like a man. He rose to his feet; he felt like shouting again. A verse of a psalm floated back on his mind from long ago, unheard, unsaid, since he

was a youth. Quaintly, not irreverently, he took it to himself:—

> "For God of Zion hath made choice.
> Here He delights to dwell,
> This is my rest, here will I stay,
> For I do like it well."

In the falling misty evening, on the road to the station, he said over and over to himself:—

> "This is my rest, here will I stay,
> For I do like it well."

He recalled, also, a question put to the tall grizzled man and the answer to it. "Had your last laird, Sir Alec, no brother?" That was the question; and the answer:—"Never a one; nor his father before him. There's been nae spare sons at the mansion-house this while back."

That seemed conclusive. The Craig was not mentioned, nor any sons who might have been there at one time—nor any daughters for the matter of that. Miss Moray had not been named, and the man from the Kawa River had no sight of Lauder in his dream.

Shaking inwardly with excitement, with strange recollections and wistful purposes, he sent off his telegram: "*I'll take it. See you to-morrow morning,*" and then a train "out from Baldragon" conveyed him back to Insch and by eleven o'clock he was in Edinburgh again, and a very deliberately moving, tired-looking gentleman re-entered the

hotel Lochinvar. His eyes were nearly obscured in puffy folds, but his mind danced a Highland fling.

"I'll go to forty-two thousand for it—or maybe forty-three," he said to his soul, and sat at a bedroom window half the night, looking into that steep glitter of Edinburgh which may seem as unearthly and be as lonely as the creepy blackness of a tropic swamp. He lay down at last, and the city racket began to wake, and it made a dream for him in which he heard the surf boom along the Coast, and wanted to set sail for Ashludie and could not, for some one held him back—some one whom he seemed to know, though he could not see the face.

But that vanished in the morning, when he went out to see the lawyer.

VI

A GIRL IN A GLEN

IT was May—late May—and Scotland was doing itself justice in the matter of weather. It does not always manage so well. One must confess that the air can be "thrawn," not only in May, but in June, at times, and even in August. Such a thing happens elsewhere, however, and summers in England are not proverbially steadfast. Let us grant Scotland her little ways, her tempers, her moods; among them are days of crystalline joy, when you would not be anywhere else in the wide world. They flash on you after rain and wind, with "the body of heaven in its clearness," from dawn to sunset one tonic radiance—three of them, it may be, strung on a thread. If after these there are more tantrums, what does it matter? They also will pass and clear the air, and again the north will show what it can do.

It was "at that with it," to quote a local phrase, in the last week of May, the year that Ashludie was sold; and of that year it is sufficient to say, as a matter of chronology, that it came before

"the union of the Free and United Presbyterian Churches," when the ecclesiastical climate of the country still breathed something of the old clan spirit, and Esau and Jacob had often something to say to each other, with a third party looking on. This might be a "thrawn" state of things, but it was "lifey," and there are still many who would give it a welcome, could it return. That, however, may be impossible. The ecclesiastical May seems to have forgotten tantrums and foresworn bitterness. There are no more blasts from the hills of controversy; every one can in peace daidle about his own garden and grow pot-herbs.

This may turn out to be less interesting than the period of barometrical pressures. The sky may never break forth with that crystalline freshness which pays for much. We shall see. When the man who had done trade on the Kawa River came to Ashludie, Scotland was still in the day of "'Stablished, Free and United Presbyterian." The parish of Kilpirn had two of them, and its church weather was "fair to moderate."

The laird came out of the old fortified gateway in the glen and stepped along beside the high wall of the garden—*his* garden, where his vegetables were beginning to show, and his pot-herbs were crinkling on their stalks, and his glasshouses were preparing to supply grapes and tomatoes for a dinner-table which, as yet, was laid with only one cover, just as in Sir Alec's time; but then Sir

Alec was a young man who might found a family. The new owner of the gardens and the castle did not look that sort, nor a company sort, either. An odd blend of authority and loneliness hung about him, as a peculiar but not unsuitable grey coat hung about his weighty figure. He had come out with his house slippers on and a shapeless Panama hat, and went with a deliberate step on the gentle incline of the road, his head a little bent forward, his hands in the pockets of the overcoat. The day was warm, but not too warm; the road easy and retired and charming, a burn flowing on the right, and over it a shoulder of hill rising massively—the hill that screened his terrace on the eastward side.

Nothing could be more to the laird's taste. He daundered up the way and was one of the very happiest men in the whole world. The children playing by the burnside under the road were not so guilelessly pleased, for they disputed as to the right way to catch fish. This big child had caught his fish, and could not think enough of it. He looked over the low grey wall and down the bank. "Dinna disagree, bairns, it's o'er bonnie a day for casting out," he called to them, and went on toward the wee village that lay farther up. At the going in of the clachan was the Craig, where, as he understood, there were two ladies who called him "the man" and meant never to speak to him all their lives.

He, for his part, meant that they should; and

more than speak. They should be friends; they should come to dinner; they should "drop in." He wanted a few people who would drop in and let him do the same; neighbours of the old, hearty, homely sort. And what harm had he done these ladies that they should be stiff and thrawn? He had not seen them yet; they kept out of his way; he was told that Miss Moray would not so much as come past the gate. Her road from the glen, to railway station or elsewhere, was to be by the footpath over the hill, on her own bit of land, and down by the quarry. She couldn't keep that up, he said to himself, as he followed the burn; no, she'd tire of that, and he meant to have the women won over yet. It might take time, but he'd watch for a chance. When a thing can be done quick—buying a property, for instance, if the seller needs money—do it so, and enjoy yourself. Sometimes it must needs be done cannily—"and weemen-folk are awfu' kittle, black or white, or how they make 'em," remarked this man of the world to himself. But one can enjoy managing, too; one can relish almost anything in which one expects to succeed.

The laird was curious about these "weemen" who were said to be so angry with him. He did not wonder that they were angry, that they had sore hearts over it. "A pair o' auld maids, poor creaturs! They'll come round if I court them a bit, and we'll be the best o' friends in a whilie.

A pair o' auld maids, and fikey at that. A man may just be sorry for them," moralised the new laird. It will be seen that he had not, so far, had much conversation with Mrs. Campbell. She was severely keeping her distance, and Peter maintained silence on the subject of Lauder. "Miss Moray and Miss Lauder," the laird said to himself—or rather, to the burn and the hill, for being much alone, and full of thoughts, and afraid of nobody, he was beginning to murmur aloud. "Miss Moray and Miss Lauder.—They're mighty genteel and stuck-up, no doubt, but that needna trouble me. And they've something to lose by quarrelling, if they'd just see it. A bit o' canny courting, now! Two of them, and keep them strictly equal. It's not a bad ploy."

His native Fifeshire dropped from his large mouth; the odd grey coat made him look very sizeable; he strolled on to Kilpirn, which he liked immensely, and had already begun to haunt. It seemed no more public, this road—an old drover way from strath to strath, scene of many a tough bout—than the winding paths in the den of Ashludie behind the castle. And it was his own land till he came to the Craig at the farther end of the wee settlement. He had not yet gone beyond this point. For the few days of his domicile, Kilpirn had been enough. It was already the sweetest place in the world to him. He daundered on, examining everything.

First, four cottages, hanging to the roadside, their gardens tumbling to the stream. Over against them, a croft steading or two, set high in nooks of the hill, and reached by a foot-bridge somewhere, or a road that fetched a long compass. Then, on a green space of their own, the church and manse of Kilpirn. On a little crag above the burn the church stands, lifted between the walls of the glen; beyond is the manse, with an open orchard between it and the road. There are felled trees lying about on the grass; you may go to the front door, or the end door, as you choose; there is a dovecote, and the poultry are everywhere. In May the manse has a cloud of white and pinky blossom about it; in September small red apples ripen, unguarded and careless. There are dowie little gravestones in the kirkyard on the mound: they are safely walled in, and the gate locked, lest they should creep to the edge and slide over; the stiff squat tower stands to watch them. Below it, the burn rushes out to freedom like the silly young thing it is—out of the glen and into the world; such a quiet world, after all!

For, first, the burn has to wash the sloping orchards of the four cottages and a half that finish Kilpirn; then it has to sneak by the side of a big field, quite out of sight, along the edge of the road till it comes to a bridge and is visible once more. But, getting out of doors again, so to speak, this bright little burn, full of life and "go," finds

itself appropriated by the quarrymen's cottages. Their gardens run with it, their women wash in it, where it makes a double to escape them; the joiner and blacksmith encamp on the tiny peninsula and make a show of business. The burn prattles cheerfully past it all—the strips of "tatie" and cabbage, the gooseberry and currant bushes, the old fruit-trees, the planks and odd wheels and rusty iron that strew the peninsula. It makes the gardens green and lush; it plays with the children and croons softly, in summer evenings, to the old folk "sitting out" on benches. In spring and autumn it takes turns, like the Highland thing it is, and surprises the blacksmith by swilling out his shop; but, summer or winter, it grows douce, always, when it comes to the Secession kirk standing among the fields.

At this point the burn loses its youth and becomes a mere common farm stream, lurking about the strath, somehow, until it gets to the river, two miles away, below Mid-Ferry, and contributing to the glory of the Coire, ceases to be. That is life for a burn, though it began as a wild little prince among fern and bracken, heather and mountain-ash, and joined itself, one merry day, to the princess that came down through the den of Ashludie to meet it. The two run fast, very fast, below the church mound, but life waits for them in the strath.

How does it wait for a woman at the Craig—

a woman who sits indoors behind curtains, while the new laird saunters up the glen?

"Ye weary yourself," said Miss Moray, "and keep doing, for thirty years, and make nothing of it. I'm out o' conceit with the whole business. I'm to look to my ain way now."

It was just as if she were fighting somebody.

"Oh, I wish you would!" cried Lauder, at the window, looking out into the glen. She thought she knew what she was answering to, but she didn't—not a bit. "I wish you'd get sick tired of doing your duty by the house and saving sixpences. Let's take afternoons at Baldragon, anyway, and see the shops and get our tea at the new café."

Lauder loved to have tea in that way, and to fancy herself in Germany again.

"I canna afford to be aye going into Baldragon, was the answer, through set lips. She had begun to pinch hard, and Lauder's new costume was seen afar off.

"Toots, it doesn't cost that much! I want to make you feel so wicked that you'd be for setting off to see the world, where the real cafés are, whether you could afford it or no. If it were me, just now, I'd take all I was worth and go away from things."

She hovered at the window, like a bird waiting for it to be opened, and Miss Moray cast from the fireside the queerest of glances, half startled,

half one knew not what; certainly, it was like fighting. "I'm nae wickeder than other folk," she muttered. Lauder shivered, though the May sun outside was so warm. At that moment, down the glen, the new man was resting from his labours on the churchyard wall, and considering whether he would call at the manse. He decided that perhaps he had better have his boots on when he performed that ceremony. The minister had been, hot foot, to visit the castle, and was bidden look in again soon and bring his lady. It might be as well to see her first, before using freedom; women being "kittle." If she saw him from the manse windows, and came out to speak, he was ready. From where he sat he could see the Craig, perched on a hillside farm where the glen made a sharp angle, and the Ashludie burn came in.

"I'll set off on nae jaunts," a woman was saying, up there. "That man's sure to be on the road, travelling by rail, and stravaigin' the country-side. I'll no' can keep my hands off him if we meet."

It was a country-side Miss Moray who spoke, one whom Lauder had almost forgotten: she was not unknown in earlier years. This aunt gave a glance and set her face, and went on with a task she had appointed herself; a task which, already, Lauder hated, as she had never hated any household occupation in her life. Every day, in the spaces between other work, every evening when the other work was done, the mistress of the Craig

sat down to make curtains—netted curtains. She was going to have her own house right, she said, now that she was "through with Ashludie." Lauder could see no especial need for lace curtains. Each window had its own elaborate pair, and two pair to the drawing-room, as fashion requires. But if any showed signs of wear, there were plenty more, and cheap, in Baldragon. It seemed, however, that her aunt—an aunt coming back from many years ago—had determined to fit out the Craig with netted drapery; in emulation, perhaps, of the patchwork at the mansion-house.

So—one foot pushed forward holding the long loop, one hand gripping the web, the other hand plying the little shuttle and drawing the knots tight, while a sandy brow knotted itself above—there you had Miss Moray after dinner and after tea and after supper. It went on interminably. For aught Lauder knew, it sometimes went on all night. Auntie Bella looked as though it did.

One, two, three; five into one and on again; Miss Moray, with the Carter face bent sternly, was making lace curtains for all the windows of the Craig. There were six windows visible from the road, and each curtain would take at least a month. What a prospect!

"Auntie Bella!" cried the girl—she was bluff, impetuous, because half-scared—"auntie Bella, you'll get lace curtains for the price of the cotton just now, and you'll get winter stuff a bargain to

make those new dresses we were to have. We're needing *them*, if you like!"

The eagerness in her young, quick face cut sharper lines than should have been there. Since auntie Bella could fight, why did she not do it better? Do people *feel* things when they are middle-aged, or do they only *think* they feel them? Young life and angry at the window itched to pull away mesh and shuttle and throw them on the kitchen fire. Why could she not do with her aunt what she had done many a time with Sir Alec, when she had closed his books and stuck his cap on his head and pulled him out to the woodland terraces and the den. Oh, the den of Ashludie, just away to the right, where the primroses and anemones came up like lovely thoughts, and the oak-fern overhung the slopes with fairy joy, and along the crest the wild rasps ripened as they did nowhere else; her very own rasps, always left for her picking. Brambles, too, from which Mrs. Campbell made jelly, and it was sent to Lauder in Germany, all the way, along with a good supply of Ashludie honey and other things. Well, she would gather no more oak-fern, no more rasps or brambles in the den of Ashludie; all that was over; and how could one go on living in a cage at the back of one's life, with bars of pride and grief drawn right across?

"I wonder at you, auntie Bella! Are you going to creep over the hill to the quarry all the

rest of your life, summer and winter, and have the folk watching to see you do it? It's more than I can do. I'll go back to Germany and teach, rather. Ashludie's closed to you and me now. Let's close the Craig, too, and leave the man the whole glen to himself."

"Such havers! I've got to watch expense, I tell ye. There's a deal to make up—a deal to make up."

Was she turning "dottled," as they say in the north? Lauder gave a glance to her and that awful netting. "You can live very cheap in Germany," she said. "We could take a wee flat, and I'd see you had no trouble. It's all so simple when one knows. And we'd forget."

"D'ye say so? Your memory's short, maybe. Mine's long—long!"

Something in the tone made the girl shiver again. The need to escape was like a wrath within her, like a madness that would grow and grow till she had to throw herself off the edge of things. Could one ever come to sit with one's back to a window, weaving dry tears and a breast-pang into netted curtains?—"Not me!" said Lauder; and indeed she was right. Not for her the draping of a room, patchwork or other. She must fight with her own soul and with fate in a different way from that—the Moray way, which had never been to sit still.

The sharp catching sigh of a young heart came

from Lauder at the window; no sigh at all from Miss Moray by the fireside. One, two, three; five in one and on again, silently. Oh dear!

"Auntie Bella, if that strange man is going to be always on the roads, I'll be meeting him, and wouldn't you like me to have a new dress and a fresh hat, just for pride, you know?"

Miss Moray seemed to have no pride left except for curtains. Lauder clenched her hands, her brown eyes filled with tears—a rare thing with her. Why, why is life so cruel? She couldn't do anything without her aunt, now. It was different when Sir Alec was alive, and she and he were chums, and he knew all her thoughts. Books came then, and a present of a new purse once in a way. She had six empty purses, treasured in a box; they were never empty when they came slipping to her hand on a birthday or New Year's Day. To the last Sir Alec had his little ways of helping her, though she plagued him to his face and made fun of him behind his back. And now there was no one—*no one.* The girl closed her hands tight behind her and stood very straight, letting the big tears fall. They burnt her eyes, and she hated crying. She hated being kept within barriers, though her own pride built them. An old dress? Oh, that didn't really matter! Serge is country wear in any weather, and Lauder's face seemed to suit a sailor hat. But freedom matters; and there is no more

freedom in this glen of Kilpirn. Apparently, one is not even to have a shilling in one's pocket for anything. And Lauder turned hot all over and flushed scarlet to her hair as she perceived what this might mean.

A fine hardness followed the tears and the flush.

"Well, I'll away out and help to single turnips, if there's nothing better to do. The farmers will be real glad of another hand, they're so pushed. And by-and-by there'll be the hay, and then the hairst. And—if that man from Africa is on the road, and should take a fancy for me—there's no saying what may happen yet. They mostly do take a fancy for me, some way."

She was gone, singing carelessly to herself, with the suspicion of a quaver,

"Oh waly! waly! up the bank,
An' waly! waly! down the brae."

It was the Lauder of several years back, before Leipsic, before various little incidents in which a long-haired lassie, with a face all rose-flush and high-cut frankness, and simple brown eyes, had seemed, somehow, not to belong to the Craig at all.

"Oh waly! waly! up the bank,
An' waly! waly! down the brae;
An' waly! by yon burnie side,
Where I an' my love wont to gae!"

The simplest words, the simplest air, and a girl's

voice with a trouble in it going out to the glen. Miss Moray burst into weeping, hard, muffled weeping over her knotted threads. Is this what it all comes to—this?

Strange thoughts of life and what it may mean haunted the mistress of the Craig. An awful loneliness overtook her.

VII

"TO THE HALF OF MY KINGDOM"

IT was much too early for singling turnips on a hill-farm. The green rows were only just appearing across the fields and the farmer had no need of a hand that day. But he promised hay-making and a "hairst," and talked of wages with a smile. "We'll be only too glad, Miss Lauder," he said, "if you're here then, and not better employed."

"Well—I may be netting curtains or making patchwork for a room by that time," she answered, looking past him at the sky, like a young fellow who longed to hear the sound of battle somewhere.

The grave, weather-cured farmer smiled again. "*You* at the patchwork business? I think I see ye. They'll not let you come to that, nor to a hairst, neither. Leastways not my sort o' hairst."

But he could not make her smile. On the contrary, it seemed that she might be affronted.

"I'll go to Mid-Ferry," she remarked, "and see the doctor's folks," and so wandered on, the farmer

shaking his head after her. Miss Moray was driving things o'er hard, was his conclusion, and somebody should come and carry the young lady out of it all. Singling turnips indeed! "Did ever anybody hear the like?"

Lauder's figure moved over the brow against the pure May sky. It was all she could do not to strike across the pasture and over the wall into the den and so by the dear old paths and crags to the back of Ashludie and in to spend an evening with Mrs. Campbell and Peter. But "the man" might be anywhere. They said he was all over the place and thought nothing of sitting down in the kitchen to ask a lot of questions. One couldn't go there; and Peter and his wife were almost blotted out. Lauder stopped and went on again, and halted, and then ran. How the burn called to her from the trees, telling of things which no one knew but itself; beautiful things, things that were so very sad, now! The girl went on into the world. If the doctor's wife were busy—and when was she not?—she might have a helper for the asking. She was very nice, and so was the doctor—a brown-bearded, bright-eyed human being, driving round to pull other human beings out of bad places, or cheerily tell them that they were all right and must not "tine heart." Lauder had an enthusiasm for the doctor and the doctor's folks, and at Mid-Ferry, with the door-bell ringing and the meals to keep

warm and five children to slave for, a person would not be bothered with much time to think.

Having some time, on her way past the quarry, the girl considered how matrimony could be worth while with a new baby every other winter and the income of a country doctor's practice. Even supposing one had no other way of securing food, clothes, and pocket-money, it seemed scarcely to answer, the food and clothes being of the plainest, and the pocket-money non-existent. Nor did she see how the doctor himself made up. He was out nearly all day, and the sleep which the babies left undisturbed was broken by the night bell. It was heroic, certainly. Attractive? Well, no! Matrimony required more alleviations. Shut up to it, on its bare merits, it did not seem nearly good enough.

And so she came down from the quarry to the main road. The May afternoon was all blue and crinkled white above, brown and every shade of young green below, with a long grey thing streaking from the hills in the west to Baldragon in the east. Lauder stood looking towards the cloud which meant Baldragon and all its chimneys, all its wealth and toil. Lauder knew the wealth chiefly.

An elderly man of some presence, in a loose grey coat, came round the bend from Kilpirn and saw the long valley stretching itself in spring raiment. An engine in a quarry not far off

hummed like a great fly; the cottages of Whitehouses lay like stones which had rolled out of the hillside and stuck, somehow, and gathered thatch. Beyond them, a clump of building stood in the fields. It was not a farm-steading, though it looked like one, and it was not a school. The man who came strolling round the hill wondered what it was, for it stood on his land.

A nearer object caught his eye: a girl's figure, tall and slender—not a bit too tall, and not too slim either—fresh and "fit" looking, in a dark dress with a round white hat. It stood poised on the edge of the road, outlined against the spaces of earth and sky as though it had just flown down the brae and stopped there, among the broom bushes that overhung the burn. They shone about her; her shape was lifted over them with an air quick and decisive, though motionless. Beyond her he saw the faint blue hills of Strathruan coming on to meet the Coire. Her eyes were the other way, and when he moved were on him—large brown eyes, honest and a little startled. Yes; for some reason; though she appeared to be quite in her own country, they were somewhat startled. The humming of the quarry had been in her ears, as it was in his, and some thought in her mind. Her eyes were like those of a collie dog, the very best collie in the world, but not the happiest. The large-built, elderly gentleman was not expert in phrases, but he loved collies, and

that was his way of feeling when the girl's face was turned towards him. She had a firm little mouth, and the silk of the broom was in her hair —the prettiest coil that ever disputed betwixt gold and brown—and he of the grey coat wanted there and then to be friends with this young lady.

"Is that one of the farm-steadings on this estate; or what is it?" he said, extending an arm and pointing a large sallow finger at the nondescript building among walls and bourtree bushes on the open road beyond Whitehouses.

"No. It's Peter's kirk. As you say, it's on your land."

He had not said so, and, anyway, it was an odd remark. The tone was keen and high. "Peter's kirk?" he said to himself. There had been no word of a Romanist place of worship. Then he remembered, and paid her back, quietly, for the fun of the thing.

"Quite so. And that will be the priest coming up the road just now, I suppose? He'll be collecting Peter's pence, no doubt."

He took it for granted that she belonged to some of the "swells" in the neighbourhood, and he liked her more every minute; the way the curved mouth pressed itself together, and the colour rose on the firmly shaped cheeks under the simple hat; the way the brown eyes looked far past him with an air of offence. His eyes, small, searching, close-

folded, studied her with the greatest interest. She was intent on the eastward opening of the valley.

"If he's the Established minister, he won't be collecting anything; they never do," she said, in the same tone as before. If he had only known, she was raging at herself for speaking at all.

"He's not the Established man," returned a big mouth, quietly, one might almost have said confidentially. "Young chap, with a brown moustache and a pair of good legs and a pale face—way they make 'em now-a-days."

"They make them very good!" answered the girl, holding herself even straighter than before. It occurred to the laird that she might be a manse lady—Episcopal, most likely. He had better be careful. Didn't want to set any of their backs up. The young minister, whoever he was, had stopped to enter something in a pocket-book.

"He's worth helping, is he—that one?" A shocking straw hat nodded slightly down the road in the direction of a black felt article which began to approach. The brown eyes saw neither —or seemed not to. Somehow, they caught the fact of the house-slippers in which this laird was shuffling about.

"Worth helping, is he—that one?"

No, she wouldn't turn even an eyelid to look.

"I'll do it, you know. I'm Established myself—if I'm anything, after—after a lot of years on the Coast. But I'm not going to make any

difference. If a chap's doing any good, and a bit of money 'll help him, he has only to ask for it—once in a way; a reasonable bit of siller."

"Everybody is not a minister; everybody is not collecting money," said the cold high voice; and then it burst out, "And there's *all* the difference since you came!"

Her eyes, wide open, appealed to the strath for something. The young man arrived and lifted his hat to her; she did not heed him. The older man stared as much as he could; his eyes not being adapted for that exercise; and neither did he attend to the young shepherd he was so willing to help, nor did the shepherd attend to him, though a chief heritor should have the homage of the clergy of all denominations, and, as laird, he might drive some of the sheep out of the Secession-fold if he chose. No, they were both occupied with a girl's protesting face, a girl's protesting voice.

"What in the world's earth is the matter?" the one was saying to himself, with his hands in the pockets of his loose coat. And who was she? and what quarrel had she with himself? The other knew very well what was the matter, and as Lauder's eyes were on the smoke mist of Baldragon, his were fixed on her: very quiet, settled eyes; something the matter with him, too, you might easily have guessed. How still the strath in the May afternoon! How the heart

beats in its spring-time and pushes a bud of hope, a slim, tender thing, through the close folds of circumstance! The tree of life is so strong, and the bud can hardly break through!

And so they stood a moment, and then the laird spoke.

"Young lady, can ye no' say what ye're needin' and where the fault is? I'll mend it if I can—even to the half of my kingdom," he said, with a gleam in his face. He was not given to smiling.

"Thank you very much," answered the maid, a wave of rose colour flying through her face. Oh, she was wroth with the world at large, and with herself, too, by this time! "But I never go begging. I hate it! You can talk to ministers about that sort of thing. Good afternoon!"

The sailor hat made an inclination to the felt one on the minister's head, and was away down the road, directly, at a pace that did not slacken until Mid-Ferry was reached. There Miss Lauder romped with the doctor's bairns in the orchard amongst new-cut grass until they were ordered to bed, and she came back in the gloaming, escorted by a small dispensary youth who was proud to be her cavalier and much disgusted when she offered him "a piece"—otherwise cake. It seems that people are always tendering each other a stone of some kind for the desired bread.

"Seems to have wiped us both out with one stroke—eh?" remarked the laird, when he and

the young pastor were left standing. "You're not her clergyman, that's plain!"

"Oh no," answered the other, "I am not her clergyman."

He watched the swift figure descend the brae, and his voice was deep and quiet with a nameless accent of the south country in it.

"You're a Free, I suppose? Where's your kirk?"

"Down there. You are looking at it."

"Oh! 'Peter's kirk'? That's what she called it. Now, who's Peter?"

"Your gardener, I suppose, Mr. Rattray. My church is called after the quarrymen's hamlet—Whitehouses." His tone was very proper.

"Just so—just so!" said the laird, somewhat quickly. "Young ladies like their little jokes, don't they? But she's a real honest lass, yon."

He congratulated himself that he had not let out a suspicion as to the young minister himself being Peter. But alas, for human vanity! How was he to know the other false steps he had made? Elderly gentlemen clopping about in house-slippers can blunder a good deal. This one would hardly let his new acquaintance go.

"What's your hurry? Come up to the mansion-house and have some tea," he said. The word "mansion-house" was a sweet morsel to roll under the tongue. "You've got a sick-visit to make? Well, of course, you ministers are expected to cry

in when there's any distress, but I'll look for ye to-morrow. I'm to make no difference, as I was saying before you came up. You'll all be welcome, and get fair play. I want to do what's right by everybody."

"That is very good news for a Secession minister," said the young man. "I am happy to hear it."

He did not seem particularly happy, all the same, and the laird thought him "some stiff" as they stepped up the road together. However, that did not matter in the least. Formality in the clergy is no sin, and a laird's a laird any day. Mr. Rattray went back on the young lady.

"I've made a big promise," he said, shuffling comfortably on, "'the half of my kingdom.' But I believe she'd get it. She's a real honest sort of lass."

The serious young man was in a meditation of his own on the same lines as Mr. Rattray's, only more definite. A big promise? The trouble was, she wouldn't have your promises.

"Her and me must be friends," pursued Mr. Rattray. "Who is she?"

They had reached the old gateway at the turn into the glen. The man in the loose grey coat and shocking hat and slippers looked proudly at the turreted square sides and the chamber between them over the low arch. It was a joy beyond words to go in and out here. That garden wall,

too—high and mossy, and the smell of growth that came over it!

"Who is she?" said the new laird dreamily, and out of another dream a voice answered him:

"Do you not know the young lady at the Craig—Miss Lauder Graham?"

James Rattray turned and stared silently for a minute.

"What's that?" he said at last. "A young lady? I never heard but of two auld maids—begging their pardon."

And then the minister stared at him. But when he had explained, as he thought, sufficiently, the laird still seemed surprised.

VIII

"NOW, WHO IS SHE LIKE?"

"MISTRESS CAMPBELL, ye're to tell me all about the Morays, if ye please."

The laird had made his way to the housekeeper's room after tea and found Peter reading *The Baldragon Herald* and Susan his wife knitting a semmet. All Peter's underwear was of her weaving, and if her thoughts got into the web as it grew between knitting-pins and fingers, then was the elder well clothed, for Susan's meditations went among psalms and "chapters" that she knew by heart from childhood. They were varied, no doubt, by secret and skilful plans for circumventing the natural "slippiness" of the human housemaid, but Susan could go back to her meditations from anything, and blend them with anything. Life is all one, and nothing that you ought to do—"maun do," was her word for it—could ever be a cause of dropped stitches elsewhere, "if your mind's settled." So she knit, and considered the housemaids, and had her "good words" running through like an organ accompaniment to a humble

song. And when the laird came and commanded her to the business room to talk to him, she was quite ready.

"All about the Morays is a good deal, sir, but when you're tired you can bid me stop," she said, following Mr. Rattray along a passage and knitting as she went.

"The laird's room" was on the ground floor overlooking the terrace, a plain, low-ceilinged apartment in which the new owner of Ashludie found much delight. The rest of the house he looked upon as a museum and picture gallery for walking round and glorying in and, by-and-by, entertaining in, but not for the likes of him to use in his ordinary. He couldn't. His bedroom, though by Mrs. Campbell's compulsion the best in the house, the "large green room," gave him no trouble. Its heavy Georgian furniture and entire lack of modern toilet fittings precisely suited him. He enjoyed this bedroom, with its two windows and free prospect; and the breakfast-parlour, with its nook in the tower, woke some feeling which he never thought of analysing. But the business room—the laird's room—there he knew himself.

There he sat down, spread himself wide in a leather chair by a bit of bright fire, bade Mrs. Campbell sit opposite "and drop that knitting" and tell him all about the Morays.

"Take your time," he said. "I've plenty, and so have you, and you'd need let your bones gather

some flesh. You mind me of the missionary women out There. You've just the same kind of look. One of them nursed me through fever twice. She was more than a mother to me. You're like her."

His large chin rested on his breast; his small eyes nearly lost themselves in Coast memories. He was not paying compliments. The still face of the woman across the hearth let out a singular gleam. Not even Peter knew that to Susan the crown of life would be to go to the black women of some Kawa River and teach them how to live.

"Then you'll give us something for the good work out There, Mr. Rattray," she said, striking practically home. He nodded, watching her and dreaming the old dream of the Coast once again while the cool vivid May evening gleamed over the terrace and a breeze came soughing up from the sea. The tale of the Morays was like a Scots ballad crooned to the beat of the African surf.

"Peter would tell ye that there have aye been Morays in the land since the beginning o' time, and we needna say him nay. They've been here, anyway, since Queen Mary. It's a' in books upstairs, and ye can read it. They made bits o' fortunes in Baldragon and up and down Fife in those days, same as now, and a Moray from the south, who was in trade wi' France, had gathered some cash, and he came and bought Ashludie. It was just a fortalice in front of the hills where

Wallace had hidden long before. And there were Carters at the Craig then, but when you belong to a big clan it makes a difference. The Morays built, and got in with the head folk at Balmore, and were looked up to. Syne, one of them got a title for being on the King's side, but they were na' always that."

So the tale flowed on. The Moray men took part in things; there was a dash in the blood; they could never be still, nor the women either. They went into rebellions and managed to come out again with their heads on their shoulders if not exactly with their estate whole in their hands. They were mostly Jacobites and Episcopalians—particularly the ladies; but among the men there had been exceptions: the Wallace tradition had left its mark. In 1745 there was an old laird who was "out" and with difficulty made his peace, but did make it, somehow. Of his sons, one was killed at Culloden, another, with a large family, succeeded to a crippled inheritance, and had much ado to hold his own. It was a poor house and a merry one, Ashludie, while his children were growing up and coming and going. The eldest of these died in battle; the second son was laird for a time, and married and lost two or three children, and died early; a third went to India, and succeeded there, and came home and died unmarried. Between these, sisters were sprinkled in—beauties some of them, who married well and redeemed the estate

and left it to the son of a much younger brother. This heir, Captain Sir David Moray, killed in a frontier skirmish, left a child who became Sir Alec. But there were two other lines, drawn from the old laird, Sir Andrew of "the Forty-Five." He had three sons—the one who followed him in Ashludie, under heavy fines and forfeiture; the one who fell at Culloden; and another who married the heiress of the Craig. "The Culloden one" left two girls and a boy.

The girls were quite unimportant to the narrative, the boy only of consequence as he was the progenitor of one who was educated in France and married a cousin Hetty and became the father of the present Sir Victor. The third of old Sir Andrew's sons—he who married the Craig heiress—had himself two sons and a daughter. Again, the daughter was unimportant, and disappeared from the tale. Of the two brothers, one succeeded as factor to the Ashludie property and was the father of Miss Moray and her sisters; the other went to England and married a woman with a little money, and "wasted himsel'" until, to Miss Moray's horror, he became for a short while baronet, but, mercifully, never cared to show himself at the old place.

How all this hung together, and life followed life, and death came after death, and cousins spread abroad into "branches," and the House of Ashludie would almost have gone out but for the sisters

who, about 1830, bought back some of the lands and repaired the castle, it was clear as her own personal history to Susan Campbell, and a mesmeric tangle of three centuries and a half and their phantoms to the man from Africa. He could see a first Moray of this ilk coming up from the south "in Mary's time," with some money gathered in trade and viewing the bonnie slope of Ashludie on the settled side of the hills with bastion and moat and gate, the protecting steep behind and large sweep before. James Rattray saw a man to whom all this appealed, and who hastened to make it his own.

Then, after two hundred years, old Sir Andrew stood distinct and gallant, imperilling everything for the Stewart cause, conspiring, hiding, escaping, finally dying in peace, an aged Jacobite, rescued by the daughters who, as girls, had gone mad with him over the Pretender, and been proud to throw the family fortunes away. Somewhere in the story a Covenanter appeared, a laird of the people, joining hands with the Carters, who were always true blue, and had a knack of adding up kings and statesmen for what they were worth in the scheme of things and acting accordingly. After these, dissolving views again—French cousins and Carter marriages leading on to "auld rippet" in Liverpool and Sir Alec at Ashludie; he who "might have been here yet." Susan lingered over him, and beside him the listener saw the girl with the honest, proud face, Miss Lauder.

The May evening was a drift of light grey mist drawn up by the estuary, and, above, a drift of light grey cloud with thundery edges against the pinky saffron of the sky. Out of doors, Dunwhinan rose clear against the long light of the north; in the laird's room there was twilight, and a loose, large figure on one side the hearth looked over to a thin, straight one, the face of which could not be seen.

"And who is Miss Lauder?" asked the laird. "Where does she come in?"

Mrs. Campbell seemed to feel for her knitting, as though ashamed of doing so much with her tongue.

"Miss Lauder, sir? I thought I told ye. There was the three Miss Morays at the Craig——"

And she went over that part of the chronicle again.

"Who was this doctor that's said to have run away with 'the wild ane,' as you call her?" interrupted the laird. "Where did he come from, and where did they run away to?"

Mrs. Campbell could not in the least remember where the young man belonged to, or indeed very much about him, anyway. The old doctor at Mid-Ferry, who was part of the order of the universe in Mrs. Campbell's girlhood, grew frail, and had to take an assistant. He got an Irishman, skilly, but "daft-like" in a way that amazed the Howe —not being the Highland or any other known

way. He was a great entertainment, and could speak more nonsense in half an hour than the old man could talk sense in a year. "Kind o' good-looking, too," Mrs. Campbell said—a big, loose, red-haired loon; and more than one girl danced to his pipe. The middle one at the Craig danced clean out of sight and never came back. Why he took her was more than any one could say. Perhaps she took him. At any rate, they were said to be living in Ireland somewhere, and "syne she died, poor lassie."

"And then?"

"Oh! then Miss Moray brought the child home to the Craig."

"And did the red-haired doctor fellow never cast up again?"

"Never that I heard tell of. He went clean out o' sight."

"Bad lot, I suppose?"

"I dinna think he was bad at all. Just a through-other, havering loon."

"And what like was the lass who ran away with him?"

"A stocky little Carter; just Miss Moray cut down. Folk wondered he'd look at her."

"Um! This is gey queer," said the laird out of his chair. Mrs. Campbell made no reply, and he followed a train of thought. At the place where it led him to he said suddenly: "Now, who is she like?"

Another pause.

"She minds me of Miss Nickie, her that rode wi' the Pretender to Mid-Ferry and helped to set him off in a fisherman's boat, and rode back alone in his cloak and cap. That's her portrait in the Tower room."

"Aye, aye!" said a Fife voice out of a chair. "She could do that, and never say she'd done it. Miss Moray must have been proud to get such a lassie all to herself and no interference."

Mrs. Campbell rose.

"Miss Moray 'll take nae interference from any one," she said. "She's done as she liket wi' Miss Lauder, and it's understood that she's to provide for her. But I maun be seeing to the maids, sir. It's time they were going to their beds."

She slipped away.

"I'd rather have cooked a dinner for a dozen folk," was her inward remark. "But I dinna think I've told any lees, whatever."

The laird sat still while the strath grew all grey and an old moon came up from the sea to look at it. He was going back over the Moray history and the queer match between the red-haired loon and the stocky girl at the Craig, who was also "the wild ane" of the three. Before he went to bed he took his candle to the Tower room and had a look at the portrait of Miss Nickie. It engaged a good deal of his attention after that, in his daily round of the mansion-house. There was a distinct like-

ness between the high-bred, delicately strong face on the canvas, and the girl to whom he had promised the half of his kingdom; and the two began to haunt him as if they were one and the same.

The history of the Morays haunted Mrs Campbell that night. Her usual peace was fluttered, and she lay awake till the blackbirds and thrushes began again where they reluctantly left off the evening before. She was trying to see in the dark something she had never been able to see in the daylight. In the first call of the birds she rose and looked forth from her high window, and the strange calm of the dawn, so wonderful among all the ways of nature, said to her: "Wait. Have patience. The going forth of Providence is as the morning."

IX

"PETER'S KIRK"

"SO that's what she meant by Peter's kirk? Well, ye needna mind a bit joke like that," said Mr. Rattray. The Secession minister had kept his promise to call, and the laird had given him a good tea, and recommended him to "feed up" for he was "needing it." Then they had come to the armour-hung nook at the foot of the stairs, and sat there in shelter, but with all the effect of being out of doors, and whiskey and cigars were brought and declined, and the host was not ill-pleased to have his hospitality in this shape set aside, though, as he said, he had got the best there was to be had, and if the Prince of Wales came along any day Ashludie was ready for him.

"Not that I'm going in for grandeur," remarked the laird. "A few quiet dinners by-and-by, when Miss Moray comes to herself and condescends to be friends wi 's; and a dance for Miss Lauder when *she* comes round, that's about all. I've no ambition to be counted a big pot, as they say."

He still wore a grey suit. It made him look

broad and loose as he sat in a wicker chair, looking steadily out to the valley, where another bright evening darted vivid rays like search-lights, now on one bit of river and hillside, now on another. There was something magical in the way these lights fell.

"Miss Lauder would like a dance, I'm sure," said Mr. Rattray. What girl didn't, if she told the truth? "And she's real honest; she makes nae pretences," he repeated comfortably.

The young man, a long, slim, black figure in another chair, sighed. She did indeed make no pretences, Miss Lauder, and if you were simply one in a circle of admirers, a mere item in a large collection, you knew it. She would talk to you for a whole afternoon if you met her anywhere; she would call on your mother when she thought you were safely up a glen, visiting, and win that dear woman's heart as no other could; but you would not yourself be any "farther ben" for these circumstances. They left you just where you were, a neighbour and admirer; a little better than the wee, smiling Episcopal parson at Dunragit, a little worse than the plain, shrewd, married Established man in Kilpirn; and quite inferior, as one well knew, to the brown-bearded doctor and his "folks." It seemed that only a new being, descending suddenly from another region, was likely to invade the republic of Lauder Graham's "friends" and achieve dictatorship.

With that came a sound like a throb of neuralgia, for here was a person who had arrived suddenly from another region and might have various nephews or other belongings. One thing was certain: that Miss Graham's heart belonged, so far, to Ashludie.

The wicker chair creaked sharply as the minister sat upright and drew his legs into marching order. The little sound had something painful in it.

"What's the matter?" said the laird. "You're not going yet, man. Isn't it fine here? I never thought one could be so happy in this world."

"It's very fine!" He had a full, deep, soft voice, which gave a simple phrase all the effect of music. Rattray's Scots nature had been caught by it from the first, and now its lingering cadence seemed to speak of his own strange "luck" and the beauty of the home he had won, and the women who were so near and yet were shut out, and the plain old churches up and down, and—other things. The older man, who had realised his dream, or thought he had, wanted to hear the young fellow talk.

"Sit down, lad, sit down! I'm not done with ye yet. I've often thought I'd like to have a talk with one of you ministers. Sit down as I bid ye, and tell 's how ye like it."

He was too much surprised to do anything else. The chair creaked again, and a singular silence followed, if that could be called silence in which

blackbird and thrush and chaffinch collected the news of the whole country-side and improved upon it. The evening rays went darting round, and down; round and up again went the keen swifts. Odours of many sweet old blossoming things pleased the earth and the air.

"Many's the time, of an evening, on the Coast, I've sat and listened to the old sea thundering along, or, up-country I've heard the wind taking hold of the forest as if it were so many blades of grass, and there were cannibals about, and crocodiles, and tigers, and snakes, and every slimy shiny creature that the black earth out there seems made for—and I've wondered how much there might be in the things you ministers say. It's an awful slab world, up the rivers, and we traders didn't make it any better, I know that. But I never went against missionaries, as some do. I was glad to meet with them, only—what did *they* make of it? Aren't the folks, and the snakes, and all the rest, of a piece—one al-mighty lump, like the world before the flood? Give 'em something for their rubber and their palm-oil, and let 'em be happy while they can—eh?"

Something touched a piece of armour, and it gave a quick little *ting*. "*No!*" said a deep voice.

"You're bound to say that. But you haven't been on the Kawa River. Man, the earth and the water crawl there! It's all life together:

what they call 'life.' Now here"—a large sallow hand waved to the strath—"here it's a state of cultivation nearly all over, and you gentlemen seem to me to be just ploughing each other's farms and counting each other's kye, year in, year out. D'ye care much for the job, now?"

Care for it? The young man sat up. Why, he did nothing else! The "job" was himself, that was all. What did a born Scot mean by asking such a question?

"No offence, I hope. But have ye room enough down-by? That's what I'm asking. A parish here is a wee thing. The like o' Kilpirn, for instance. It's a corner on the road to nowhere."

The laird's voice, deliberative, inquiring, judicial, got inside the young minister and, as Peter would have said, "stirred his corruption,"—that grimly expressive Scots phrase.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "There are people on the road to heaven and people on the road to hell from the little corner of Kilpirn, and they're big journeys, both of them."

What made him say that? He had never even thought it before, in that way. Nor did he realise that he had fired a shot. He was thinking of quarrymen and farmers, and a certain Baldragon manufacturer who held a neighbouring estate.

There was a pause. When James Rattray spoke again it was in a different tone.

"Well . . . that's maybe true. If the country's

what it was in my young days you'll have some heathen to tackle in the Howe. I believe I'm near hand one, myself."

"I could show you one among your neighbours; but he's not what they usually call a lapsed man."

Rattray wanted to know the name of this person, and the minister evaded the inquiry. Then they discussed the principal persons of the strath and the leading firms in Baldragon, and presently the laird said:

"Your name's Renwick. Have ye the Covenanter ahint ye?"

"I like to think so. It's only a remote connection, but we cling to it. I have the Covenanter and the Huguenot both ahint me. They are among the nobles of the earth—the best of good families."

"That's so!" said the laird. Go where he may, to Kawa Rivers or mid-Asian Sultanates, the genuine Scot never forgets either the passion of the Covenanter or that French connection which brought the Huguenot to help form the Covenanter. "That's so. And how long have ye been placed?"

"Three years."

"And before that of course ye were studying and taking bursaries, and attending classes?"

"Yes. Four years at the University, and three at the Divinity Hall, and a year in Germany, and another two years as an assistant."

"Aye, that's the way it's done. And then ye come to Whitehouses."

His tone said unmistakably, "Then you come to a corner." Renwick winced. Viewed impartially, it was nothing better. Nay, he already knew enough of the church of his fathers to be aware that Whitehouses might be his portion for life. Bonds firm, though intangible, held him to that square, barnlike kirk in the fields—bonds of presbytery, only broken by a "call," which might never come, by emigration to the colonies, or by failure of health. Three years had passed. They might lengthen out to thirty—forty—even fifty. The prospect seemed quite incredible. To a man who had almost maintained himself on bursaries during his college career, who had a B.D. after his name, and had been counted one of the most promising fellows of his "year," a call was bound to come. Edinburgh or Glasgow is the appointed conclusion of such a course; London is possible. What does not seem possible in the early years at Whitehouses, is that the course should end there. The laird's next words were like the utterance of one's own secret thought:

"Ye've got more than ye seem to need here."

Yes. It did seem as if one had ground up a lot of stuff that Whitehouses had no use for. And yet who would go back on the path of knowledge? Renwick clasped his knees, and asked that question of himself and of his college—called by

the simple fathers of the Secession, "The Hall." He asked it of the spring air flowing away to great mountain spaces in the west, to city and town, and the havens of the sea in the east. Who would go back on the path of knowledge? Is it possible to stop, though one seems to have "ground up a lot more stuff than there is any use for"? All at once the question became actual in the young man's breast; he knew that one part of his nature was asking it of the other.

Seven years' novitiate for the arming of a knight—that, at least, and then, as it would seem, he were better off with David's sling and pebbles than with the great armour of theologic and critical Saul. Seven years', and more, training for the vineyard, in all the subtleties of scientific culture, and then, apparently, a simple, honest vinedresser, with a good, practical knack, can do all that's needed. Yet the question remains unanswered—Who would go back on the path of knowledge? An obstinate voice rang out the claim of the church, that a man should be "equipped"; that medals, and prizes, and bursaries are to be sought as proofs of equipment; that the sling and stone are old-world implements, and cannot pierce the modern sense. "Research," "historicity," "unverified," clashed in his head, and against them the demand of Peter Campbell for "the plain gospel" and sermons preached "from the heart, not from the paper." His own

mother secretly made the same demand ; he knew she did, although every prize he had ever won was kept in cotton-wool, and his B.D. hood was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. She would hardly take in a letter which had not the full address,—" Rev. Hugh Renwick, M.A., B.D.,"—and still her Secession soul craved the " delivered " evangelical rhetoric of the old days, apart from criticism, apart from " Research " and " Historicity." Amid all this, a young man who was but recently " a brilliant student," heard the call of the intellect.

Forward still points the inexorable soul!

And he asked himself, Which way lies my loyalty? Is it permitted a man to go back on the path of knowledge?

The summer evening knows nothing of such a debate. Life has wide reaches to play in, great hills to nestle in. Winged creatures rise and dart over land and water with quick beat or seeming stillness of wing. Liberty has come with Maytime, and twilight only gives it a mystical touch. An exquisite pale shimmer in the east shows where the moon sails in from the sea to visit the braes of Coire and the haunts among the hills where men went hiding and women watched for the enemy. It is all over, long ago, for Wallace, and the Covenanter, and the Jacobite and the rest ; but still there are young hearts which crave to do the same in some good cause, not merely to be " equipped,"

but to fight and know what for. Is that sheen of the moon through the faint mist not as wonderful as when it lit the Wallace to his refuge in the den of Ashludie or through a chink in Dunottar found the men of Christ's evangel praying in their chains? Welcome the chains, if one had the prayer and the battle!

The young minister swayed to and fro; the mist hung between him and Whitehouses. The older man watched him. "Ye're an honest lad, I see," said a voice. "Ye ken ye have nae room for your feet down-by."

They were not such very big feet, but that was the laird's way of speaking.

"It is a good little country congregation," answered Renwick quickly; "and there are some most devoted people." He seemed to grasp at something as he rose from his chair. "I am very happy in it," he said.

But he did not get away with that. He had to go into the house and sit another hour, and then promise to come back soon and be "shown all over," as though Peter Campbell's minister had never seen Ashludie except from the outside. And then James Rattray made a sort of confession of faith, and the U.P. made his, and they came to pretty close quarters as men and brethren, and it was ten o'clock before Hugh Renwick's long legs devoured the road down to the manse in the fields. Now, if he had been a quarter of an hour earlier he

would have met a damsel named Lauder coming back from Mid-Ferry with her dispensary youth, and could have taken the place of that cavalier up by the quarry path and over the hill. To be sure Miss Lauder was not very fond of ministers, and she may have preferred the youth. Still, there would have been a chance to try to dissipate that unfortunate non-preference of hers, and "you'd wonder," as they say in the north, how few chances a man may get of cultivating friendship, though he lives on the road to the railway station and is pretty often to be met with, doing pastoral visitation in two parishes.

For her part, what she desires is Freedom. She, too, is held by intangible bonds. She feels them like gossamer threads gathering about her, but threads of a curious and horrid tenacity, such as we are aware of in bad dreams and can neither cut nor break.

Except—except—— But no! That is not freedom. It is only a change of bonds. Give me my freedom, cries the heart to the spring evening.

X

MISS MORDECAI

LAUDER was playing reels for all she was worth; the rattle of them went up and down the glen from open door and window. "The Earl of Eglinton"—a blackbird tried to get the better of it, and failed; "The Gathering" roused a thrush to match himself with it, and he gave way before its galloping disdain. Out went the challenge, and the burn tried to dance in step, but the sweet thing was too mild and low-voiced; the noisy notes dashed along and filled the air. Then Tullochgorum broke out as though a country wedding were on, and bird and burn were quite overborne. They could not imagine what barbarian had come into their world. This was no summer joy, but a rebellion. It offended the singers outside. As Tullochgorum tore ahead the glen waited for some catastrophe.

A sudden lull seemed to announce it. The challenge ceased. Defiant arms, though young and strong, must needs tire. Inside the Craig, Lauder sat looking at the keys of a piano as

if they could tell how the Gathering of life should play itself out and what would come of it.

But the keys answer no questions. The demon within them calls and capers at a touch—that is all. Outside, the birds and the stream and the June air in young foliage begin again to their cantata; they have no quarrel with the world. The sun has only to shine, and the cantata goes of itself, with a heart of pure gladness, pure freedom. "I don't know why I was made!" cried Lauder to the black and white keys. "There's no use for me: I'm not wanted."

Miss Moray came into the room. Her face had somewhat less of the Carter set than when Lauder saw it, an hour earlier, and fled from it.

"There's a letter from Miss Thomson wanting ye to go to Crieff with them," she said. Postie had just gone past on his way through the glen to a wee hamlet and a few scattered farms. He would return in the afternoon and gather up the mail at the Kilpirn post-office, and call at the mansion-house, and one could run out to him anywhere on the road and hand a letter, and it would go as safe as though by Queen's messenger and royal train. There is no need for the decent woman at the post-office to know everything. And Miss Moray means that a reply shall be sent this afternoon.

"They're to go next week, and they'll take

ye up as they go by. It'll be a change to ye," said the mistress of the Craig, adjusting a curtain and casting a glance out of the corner of an eye.

"Not much. I don't care for Crieff," was the answer.

"That's a new tale. Ye were fine and pleased to go last time. And there's nothing to hinder. Now's your chance for a jaunt before the fruit comes on."

In truth, all the occupations that women can make for themselves in a country house, in the early part of summer, had been got through: cleaning, "doing-up" of draperies and covers, sorting-out of closets, repair of clothes. There had been gardening, too, and poultry-farming. The only way Lauder ever earned a penny was by helping with the eggs and chickens that went to a certain shop at Insch every week. But except for this there was now a lull in the hot race. One campaign was over, another could not yet commence. In August they would be making jelly out of all sorts of possible and impossible fruits, from raspberries to rowans. In September they would be taking off honey in the neat little sections of the modern bee-keeper and sending it into town, and then October would swoop down from the Grampians with blows and cuffs of the north-west wind, and the bonnie days would be over. Then—then—the netted curtains

again, every evening, and the "soft" road over the hill, followed by the frosts and the snow-storms and all the rest of a winter that one could not see to the end of, with nothing better in the way of diversion than a soirée at Dunragit and another at Peter's kirk.

And yet, Lauder sat still, looking at the keys of the piano.

"There are too many ministers at Crieff," she said.

If you know Scotland you are aware that by Crieff is meant a certain hydropathic much frequented by the Presbyterian clergy; a place the like of which does not exist on the face of the earth, for you may at certain seasons find there more than three hundred people, the larger part of whom know each other's name and business at least, and have interests in common, views of life in common. The clergy, also, have many anecdotes in common, and altogether Crieff knows how to enjoy itself discreetly. Perhaps, however, discreet enjoyment in the company of elders of the kirk is not quite the kind of offer one desires a June morning to present. Something a little wilder may seem desirable.

"There are too many ministers," remarked a cool, indifferent voice. "And they all want to tell their stories and hear about calls. I'd go to Shandon if anybody would ask me."

"Well, they've maybe not quite settled on Crieff

yet," said Miss Moray. In her own mind she decided that John Thomson would not be long in changing his plan if he got a hint. "The provost can go to Shandon as well as not. His purse 'll stand it."

She called him the provost in advance. He was sure to be elected, and in a place like Baldragon other honours were apt to follow, by natural sequence, as everybody knew.

"My clothes 'll not stand it, though," said Lauder. "You must dress at a hydropathic—even Crieff—and I'm a beggar-wife."

Miss Moray flushed a dark, not beautiful, red, and turned towards the straight figure at the piano.

"You've no need to say that. I never let ye go ill-provided among other folk yet, and we'll see about dresses for ye at once—if ye're going."

There was enough pause between the last clause and the one before to give some significance. Lauder remembered her spring visit to Baldragon. She had not been over-braw then, but, somehow, she had not troubled about it. For one reason or another, it had seemed the order of nature, and never made any difference to other things. She was Lauder Graham, all the same, enfeoft as it were in Ashludie, and a princess in her own right. Now, she had no right in Ashludie any more, and the rest of her domain seemed to have shrunk. On all sides there were barriers—cross-barred

things, difficult to climb. She did not want Crieff, and she did not care twopence about Shandon, and her frocks were good enough for all she had to do in them; and so there was nothing for it but Tullochgorum!

Wherefore a wild rattle startled the glen again and drew the dark flush to Miss Moray's face. She went away and wrote to John Thomson's sister—in a somewhat shaky hand—promising that Lauder should go with her friends at the time fixed, "if we're all in our usual": a phrase which held more than the ordinary meaning.

"Her usual is to like a jaunt," said auntie Bella, "and she'll no' can stop here and let the chance go by."

The fling of the reels ceased as Miss Moray closed her letter. Lauder's dashes always came to an end if you didn't say too much.

"And we'll go into Baldragon to-morrow and buy new dresses for her," said the older woman to herself. "The creature should be gey set up, I'm thinking, to get a man like John Thomson. It's a match I might have made myself. But I'll no' grudge it to her. I'll have an easy mind, then, so far as she's concerned."

And that evening she seemed to have put aside all thought of the man from Africa, and of her lace curtains. Lauder's clothes were the topic. Miss Moray did most of the talking. Apparently, the girl was satisfied with her frocks, and had no

desire for a plumed hat, or a linen costume, or even for new ties and blouses.

"It's strange ye should take no interest when I'm willing to pay for the things," said Miss Moray with vexation.

Lauder glanced aside. "You'll pay one price, auntie Bella, and I'll pay another; and my account will not be easily settled," she said. "It's your doing and not mine, if I go to Crieff—mind that!"

Miss Moray shut her mouth up—the Carter mouth. Lauder's small lips closed also in resolute pride. Was she to be offered for sale "immediately," like Ashludie, and find the payment herself? It would take more than a couple of dresses and hats, and a fortnight at a hydropathic, to clinch that bargain.

"If Miss Thomson wants me there, to keep her company, I'm willing to go, auntie Bella. She's lost in a crowd, and they never find out how good she is. The provost, as you call him, can sit with the other elders and tell stories, and never mind us," said Lauder, very high and quiet. "And now I'm going into the den of Ashludie to get some ferns, and I don't care if the man sees me."

It is perhaps difficult to understand girls. Miss Moray looked after the one whose future she wished to arrange. "Hear her, now! Just the Moray way of speaking! How is she so like them?" The question came with more bitterness

than ever before. Then she went to her curtains. "Well, I'm doing my best for her, and she'll go off looking like a queen, and I've no doubt she'll have all the men up there at her tails, and John Thomson must look out for himself. He can make a spoon or spoil a horn. I'm sure I dinna care."

Whether John Thomson allowed himself to sit among the elders telling stories or not, he would likely have to watch his chances at Crieff and, as Miss Moray put it, "work for what he got." For young ministers go to that place, and as a class they betrayed a peculiar readiness, even among others, to do homage at the Lauder shrine, or, as the older woman said, murmuring over her curtains, they were apt to be "dafter-like than the rest about the creature." And a personable young cleric, with a taste for music and travelling, and a good city charge, might cut out "the provost," despite his advantages. "But that's a chance," concluded the mistress of the Craig. "She's not overly fond of the ministers she has here, and they'll be wise if they dinna seek her. She's never bent herself. . . . Oh, she's like them!"

"Them" meant the Morays, of course, not the ministers. The Carter face glanced up as if some one might be listening, and then closed with solid lip over shuttle and weaving. Presently the long twilight of the northern June succeeded to sunshine, and in the Craig, at a shaded hearth, a

woman sat with one web in her brain and another in her hands.

Hardly more than a bowshot off the man from Africa was taking a daunder through his policies in the now familiar grey overcoat and house-shoes. He could make himself a very well-put-on person when he journeyed as far as Baldragon, but why be at the trouble on his own land where everybody knew him? He took his freedom, and enjoyed himself. "Policies" are so pleasant when you have newly come to them, and their old ripeness of scent and shadow is all for you in a June evening. The laird stepped round by the back of the house and the little gate into the glen, and instead of turning to the right he took it into his head to follow the high path toward the head of the rift. The unusual warmth of the air seemed like coolness to one who had known the steeping heat of Africa, and the northern midsummer gloaming was inexpressibly delicious, clear and sweet as the garden of Eden must have been in the cool of the day. Shadow of wood and hillside lay close, yet untangled, the path rose between trees and mossy boulders, the hollow had a low continual murmur in it, and the height a soft thin whiteness, floating. Between these, the top of a little crag, lying out to the gaze of the opaline northern sky, made a watch tower, where loneliness met with loneliness, and one wistfulness haunted another. The little eyrie had a seat on it, and a

girl sat there and listened for the voice of the den. She had taken her freedom and come to the dear old haunt: who would find her out?

No one. She might linger till all was dark between the banks, and then creep out by the paths she knew so well to the glimmering village, and go to bed without lamp or candle, hearing the night and the burn comfort each other through the hills, and feeling as though, once more, she had them to herself.

There had been a friend—how long ago?—who loved this woodland eyrie as she did. If his spirit were to find its way to the glen, were to hover a minute between the pines, and wave a remembering hand, need one feel the least afraid? Oh, Sir Alec, come if you can! Though you are far away, in that strange vast place they call "another world," come out for an hour, and speak the name of your old companion along the hollow, just to show that love does not really perish. Cannot you do that—just that?

Between the shadows and the murmurs one thinks many things one could never say, the tears break and roll down, hard and salty, cutting one's eyes and one's soul. Everything cuts! It is awful to be young and strong, and have sweethearts by the half-dozen, and yet be all alone!

The laird drew near. In the crooning of the burn to the wood his quiet shuffle was unheard. He became aware that tears were dropping, that

hands were clasped very tight on a girl's knee, that she looked over the space above the linn as one looks into Fate, unseeing.

"What is she thinking about?" he said to himself. He cleared his throat slightly from the mist, and stood admiring the sky, as he had a good right to do. Then after a minute or so he came to the seat and appropriated a part of it. That, also, he had a good right to do.

"This will be a favourite place with ye, Miss Graham," he said gently, and Lauder held her knee in silence. He had taken to the crag, had he? Then she could not risk coming again.

"I'm glad I stepped this way," he continued. "I don't seem ever to meet ye on the roads, missie. Why don't ye take advantage of the avenue when ye're going down the way?"

He didn't stare, or come too close, and one had to admit that his voice was not unpleasant.

"I wish ye'd be friends with me, you and Miss Moray. I like being friends with folk."

Who doesn't, if it's possible? Who likes to feel the world turn small and empty all at once, a wee bare space among hills, a bit crag with sharp sides, and a rapid stream making farewell round about it: who likes that?

"I suppose it may be quiet here in the winter," said a considering, comfortable voice. "When the heather has flowered and gone by, and the harvest is in, and the nights turn frosty, we'll no

can get daundering about this sort of a way. It's fine while it lasts!"

What business had he to say "we"? It was not fine now that he had come.

"And I believe the short days may be a bit lonesome—with all the passages and stairs and rooms up and down——"

Well then, what did he come for? Nobody wanted him. He had better go again.

"——and old stories hanging to the walls like——"

Like cobwebs, he was about to say, but there were no such things where Mistress Campbell ruled. If she had dreamt of one she must have risen in the night to search for it. Nothing but the shortness of human life and breath prevented her from setting forth every autumn, with brushes and a stout knife, to clean the lichen from the old trees. And the laird was quite aware, by some intangible hint, that his remarks were not quite what is called happy.

"Lonesome!" cried Lauder, up in arms and forgetting Leipsic and the cafés. "Then you'd better leave it! You need not stay. But some folk are never dull at Ashludie—never!"

"Put me down for one of 'em," answered the man of the broad, sallow, pale face which smiled a little, not much. He meant that she, not himself, might be lonesome, and Lauder knew what he meant, and in her own mind called it "cheek."

Certainly, in a literal sense, the man from Africa had a good deal of cheek.

"I'll run ye in the liking for this place, missie, and when we pull off the match I'm no sure but I'll take the prize. You'll need to be gey fond of Ashludie to beat me, I can tell you."

He cast a searching glance while he seemed to be still admiring the sky, and something in her face caught him; a small, pale face it looked in the gloaming, with something timid and lonely in it, quite different from the flush and decision of the other day. What did it make him think of, feel like? A singular sensation came over James Rattray, as though an old tale—one of those he had spoken of—slipped out of the wood and took a new shape in order to puzzle him. And he was not used to being puzzled.

Lauder knew that "the man" was looking at her, and a sudden access of fear took possession of her—such fear as she had never before known in her young life. What made her return to this haunt? Why did she not remember that everything was changed? And what would auntie Bella say if—if the man was rude, and followed her home? That was the way she expressed a wild dread which suddenly seized her and made everything hideous. To be afraid of any one or anything was an ignominy that she resented as one resents defacement and disease. In the dear old den, too! It was spoiled, now. One

might as well go to a town, and learn to be afraid of walking alone among gas lamps. One might as well conclude at once that Ashludie was done with—over—finished, and go off to Baldragon or Crieff, or any other place, where there were folks and doings.

Yes—she would go away; but first she would tell him a bit of truth. She burst out:

"Well—you've bought it, wherever you got the money—and you can run up the flag and patronise the parish; but the stories are ours; the name and the honour are ours. You can't buy them. We are the Morays when all's done!"

Her voice sang. She brushed by him and was gone up the woodland path as if to summon the Moray clan. James Rattray stared after her. He had meant to take her home, to say kind, fatherly words, to put everything at her disposal, "even to the half of his kingdom," as he said before. And now she was just mad with him. He did not feel a bit like the owner of Ashludie. The place belonged to that lassie, and James Rattray was a stranger, making free where he had no businsss. He dared not offer to go with her, nor was he fleet enough to follow after. "We are the Morays when all's done!" rang in his ear with a break of the proud young voice and a gleam in the pale young face. A Moray, for sure, though she belonged twice over to the Carters and to other folk farther off. The laird

stepped slowly back to the mansion-house, and took a lamp through the rooms where the family portraits hung. The faces looked eerily out of their shadows. He tried to see them as they actually were in the flesh, and could not. They were phantoms mocking him, "making a fool of me," as he said to himself. Miss Nickie, in particular, seemed to ask him why he had presumed to buy Ashludie. Her eyes followed him with the inquiry; she appeared to be calling her servants to put him out. Holding up the lamp, he gave her a final glance as he went out of the drawing-room, and she was not won over in the least; her lips and eyes were saying after him, "We are the Morays when all's done!"

He knew it. And yet he had bought Ashludie a fair bargain—he repeated that, two or three times: "a fair bargain," and he meant to do right.

He went to bed in "the large green room" and Ashludie was a haunted place that night. He had never in his life known what it was to be haunted before, not even on the Kawa River. No; he took that for granted and, in his own phrase, never troubled his head about it. Now, it seemed, he would not be allowed to take Ashludie for granted.

One thing was plain. He must win that lassie over. It was no amusement, but a need, the chief need of his new life. Had he fulfilled a dream of thirty years? Not so long as Miss Mordecai, bonnie and proud, sat at the gate of the Craig, judging him.

XI

THE TIGHT ROPE

THE next day James Rattray meant to advance in form upon the Craig and establish neutrality at least, if not reciprocity ; but the factor claimed him in the morning, and Peter had plans to propose in the afternoon, and it was the following day before he could betake himself to the small house to interview, and conquer, the women-folk ! He still imagined the elder one a thin, precise mittened old maid of a pattern known to him in childhood. He meant to ask this lady to tea, and find out what societies she was interested in—a subscription or two would come cheap, and he also meant to learn from her in what way one could set about giving a party for Miss Lauder. All which good intentions were realised, as our intentions mostly are, in a very topsy-turvy manner.

" Ye can tell Miss Moray that a gentleman wants to see her," he said to the red-cheeked maid-servant at the Craig. " And ye needna say what gentleman. She'll see for herself when she comes."

Jeannie grinned and liked the joke. She carried

the message with a stolid face. Miss Moray was busy among the poultry. "A gentleman? And what's his name, then?" she demanded.

"He didna say," answered Jeannie. "Just he wanted to see ye."

"Tuts! He'll be selling parts, or tea, or some such havers. What did ye do with him?"

"He's na' a tallyman. I ken them, fine. He's a gentleman, and I put him in the parlour. Ye should wear your best dress, Miss Moray," and Jeannie proceeded to the drawing-room to stick her head inside the door and say confidentially, "Ye maun wait a wee. She has to wash her face before she can come."

The damsel then retired, keeping her ears open for results. Miss Moray was in her worst gown —hardly a gown at all, in truth—and her real Carter face. She had to change both, and it was nearly half an hour before she rustled down in black satin and lace collar, and her most competent expression, her light-coloured hair drawn back from a well-washed, experienced face, her gold chain and cameo brooch arranged on a motherly bosom. She sailed into the room. The visitor was at the back of the door; he shut it after her as he turned. Then:

"It's you? Well, of all the impudence! How dare ye?" said she.

"Oh, I've dared worse," he replied, recognising in the first glance a foe worthy of steel and

powder. A fikey old maid, indeed! Not much of that!

The pair regarded each other closely for a full minute—a space of time in which a good deal can be learnt.

"I've dared much worse. Ye forget that I've seen snakes and crocodiles, besides puckles o' wild black folk. A lady o' your appearance 'll no' fright a man."

He stood between her and the door, his hands in the pockets of the grey coat. Miss Moray eyed him. The Carter face was pronounced, and the Carter tone, which could be not so very unlike the Moray style, on occasion.

"I dinna get myself up to scare folk," she said. "That's not our way here."

The laird gave a glance down his own person.

"Is it that bad?" he asked, as though Miss Moray were the chief friend he had in the world. "Ye see, I've naebody to advise me about these things—nae women-folk belonging to me, ye ken."

"Well, ye can go and buy some," remarked the lady grimly. "They're to be had cheap, I believe—in some places."

The laird continued to give her a straight look. His broad, uncomely face expressed interest along with quiet defiance.

"I like to have friends that come a little dear, mum. That's why I'm standing here just now."

The hint was plain, but she did not ask him to sit down.

"There's nothing for sale at the Craig," she told him. "We were here before the castle people, and we'll be here after them, seemingly."

"That's a curious speech, if you'll excuse me saying so. By the young lady's way of it, she's a Moray altogether, though she hasn't the name."

Her speech sounded curious in her own ears by this time. She did not answer him, only slid a ring round a finger and bore herself as the mistress of the house. He was dull, was he, and wanted to make friends? Well, let him want!

"But you have the name. Are you not her aunt, mum?"

Miss Moray gave her head a toss. She looked every inch the strong, cool woman of business.

"Ye may be laird of Ashludie, my man, but the Craig is my castle. When I wish for your acquaintance I'll leave cards—my own and my niece's."

"Ye needna trouble about hers," answered Rattray slowly. "We're acquaint already, her and me. She's a jewel, Miss Moray."

His tone was as convinced as Peter Campbell's. He stood broad-built and quiet, looking at the mistress of the Craig with those singular greenish eyes of his. Miss Moray shook before them, though no one could have suspected anything of the kind. He would mesmerise her directly,

she said to herself, and then he would do as he liked. She put a hand on the table to steady herself, as he dropped out a sentence or two.

"Yourself and your niece. I'm sure you wish her well, Miss Moray, and I wish well to both of ye, but her more particular. That's what I came to speak about. Tell her not to stop away from the old place. Her heart's there, and it's a warm one. Dinna chill the young blood. The world 'll do that soon enough—chill it, and thin it down till it canna run and there's a heathen image instead of a woman. They tell me that happens often. I'd be sair to see it happen to yon bonnie lassie."

Miss Moray wore the Carter face. Here was another one gone daft over the creature. How did she do it?

"Tell her," said the laird impressively, "that she's no' to let me be a hindrance. I'll not impose myself on her. If she sees me about the policies she's to go on and never mind. I'll try to keep out of her way. Maybe, she'll get used to 's in a whilie, and be willing to speak. But tell her that the place is her ain, to come and go, and Mistress Campbell is wearying to see her—and Peter, too."

"She's away this morning on a visit to some friends—very good friends we have in Baldragon. She's not depending on Kilpirn or Whitehouses, I'm happy to say."

"It's not at all likely," answered the laird, with meekness; "but I'm thinking they depend a lot

upon her. It seems a real pity that she didna fall heir to the estate."

A pair of small, searching eyes in a puffy face seemed to require agreement in this view of things.

"If the young lady had been daughter to one of your brothers, now, instead of a sister——"

The mistress of the Craig flushed a dull red.

"In that case," she said hardily, "you wouldna be standing there speaking nonsense. I thought you were greatly set up with your bargain."

"And so I am. It seems like a pure providence. But I canna help thinking about the young lady She and the mansion-house just go together, that's a fact."

Miss Moray gave him a queer look.

"There's other mansion-houses forby Ashludie, and Lauder likes a stir, I can tell ye. It's a providence as it is."

"For me, do you mean, mum?"

"Oh aye!"—hastily,—"for you, of course. And it's not likely my niece will be here much longer. We'll see other changes now we've begun."

With that, and allusions to a provost's lady, and great doings that sometimes went on in Baldragon, she patronised him off the premises and thought herself very clever.

"There's an end of you, my fine man, I think," she said to herself, as she watched a broad grey figure go deliberately down the glen. "My niece

here, and my niece there, and why was she no the daughter of a brother, and so inherit the estate? He's a dooms inquisitive old carle! But I've sorted him!"

She had let slip the fact that Lauder was gone to the hydropathic at Crieff, and while she changed her dress again and went to finish her job in the poultry house, the laird was sending a letter up to that sensible and friendly resort, which he imagined a place of dazzling frivolity. His letter contained the message that he felt sure would never be delivered by Miss Moray. For her, she worked savagely all the evening. Keep her from meddling with other folks' bairns again! "I've aye acted for the best, so far as I could see, and taken a lot of trouble, and had nothing to myself out of it. I don't see what right any one has to blame me. You never can tell how things will turn out in this world. But you can act for the best, and set your face to it, syne."

She went to bed with that, and dreamed that Lauder came with a cold face and cold, strong hands, and demanded something which she said was being kept from her. The laird had told her about it, and she must have it. And it seemed that it was to be plucked out of Miss Moray's breast. She awoke, struggling, and the early summer dawn, with the voices of the birds calling through it, was like one twenty years ago, when a child's bed stood in the corner of her

room and the small face of the lassie met her eyes every morning as a new charge that could never be thrown off. "She's been on my mind ever since," said Miss Moray. "If the Lord's good to us He'll gar her take John Thomson."

Up at Crieff, Lauder heard the talk of Baldragon and other places. It was not favourable to men from Africa who had made money in the Coast trade. Ministers and elders and ladies were all against him. If he had seemed likely to distribute gifts through the community, it would have been different, for money, nowadays, however made or where, has the quality of mercy in that it blesseth him who gives and him who takes. It is a real blessing, provided it falls impartially and generously and you get enough of it. Society in general, like the Romish Church, can grant absolution that is well paid for. So far, however, the new laird of Ashludie appeared as an adventurer, profiting by the misfortunes of an old family. His career and the colour of his gold were open to challenge, and little Miss Thomson, in particular, was very sure that he must be a strange man without any character. It is hard even for people who know the world pretty well—much better than Miss Thomson did—to see how the tares and the wheat can grow together—in other persons, that is, whom one doesn't know or care for. It is always quite easy to understand the fact in one's self. The laird, for instance, had many a time marvelled at

"niggers," and perhaps the niggers had marvelled at him. Miss Thomson thought he must be nearly all black inside, but had no difficulty in holding as next door to a saint her own minister, though she knew that he made money on the Stock Exchange and "liked a glass." Poor tares, poor wheat! By only One Voice, in this world, have ye been left to "grow together till the harvest."

So, at Crieff, they were all pretty much down on James Rattray. He was not one of themselves, you see. Lauder put his letter into the fire and gave her mind to balancing on the tight rope—which means, to being "very nice" with John Thomson and his sister, who were, in effect, her hosts, and yet availing herself of the highly convenient and not unpleasant attentions of a youngish minister in the company, who had lately blossomed out as a socialist, and "broken down" in consequence, and been sent by one section of his congregation to recruit. The other section were hoping that he would see his way to leave them, and altogether, a sort of martyr nimbus hung about him and competed, rather successfully, with mere business men, who only made money. John Thomson did not like it, and expressed the opinion that the man was an ass. Then Lauder laughed, and the tight rope proved a capital thing to dance on, and Crieff was not so very "mumpy," after all.

At the end of three weeks she went back, to be considerably astonished.

XII

A SURRENDER

"WHAT is the meaning of this, auntie Bella? Is that man going to live here? Because if he is, I'll need to be off, quick."

"I might ask if you're going to live here," answered Miss Moray hastily. "What's coming of all your fine chances, lassie? You'll go through the wood and get the crooked stick at last—or no stick at all, to help ye."

"Like yourself," said Lauder saucily. It is not good for a girl to feel an older woman, who should protect her from her own heart, urging her to a sudden throw of it upon the fateful wheel of life: it is not good! "If you're tired of me, auntie Bella, you've only to say the word: I won't be here another day. And if that man has got the key of the Craig I can't stop. What has happened to change you so? You've turned right round about. I can't understand it!"

"Maybe not," muttered the mistress of the Craig "You'd be real clever if you did." Lauder was going on without hearing or minding.

"He calls when he pleases and sits talking, and gets his tea, and you are going to the house to manage it, just as you did before, and it's like enchantment. What does it mean?" cried Lauder. She was afraid to guess what it might mean. "To think of you giving in to him!"

"I give ye leave to wonder," said Miss Moray stolidly, without temper. "Perhaps he's cast a glamour over me, as you say. It's a gey story that I should change my nature at this time o' day. But ye see there's a new law. We're to be good bairns and friends among ourselves—that's all about it. It's not worth while to be casting out with folk. When a thing's done, it's done."

From the sideboard, where she was arranging some trifles, she cast a glance, with a curious mingling of wistfulness and determination in it, to Lauder, who stood by the table doing nothing, with a sort of holiday trail still about her."

"I'm making no pretences," said the mistress of the Craig. "I mean it. What's the use of keeping up things? It's a poor story going back on the past. I've given in, as you say. I canna help myself."

"Well, I can help myself, and I don't give in, auntie Bella. I see no reason for it."

"Young folk dinna see everything. Mr. Rattray will be a good friend if we let him."

This bordered on the dangerous. Lauder remembered that a minute ago she had fancied a possible reason.

"He'll be going to give dinners in a while," said Miss Moray, "and he'll need advice. The man's not fit for what he's undertaking. I used to see the place kept right from year's end to year's end and no credit for it. To be sure, when Alec did have company, it was the best, but it needed to be, for all there was of it. . . . I thought you liked a lively way of doing, Lauder!"

It was a little startling, that cry from Miss Moray's lips. "It's you I'm thinking of," she said, almost wildly; and Lauder could not receive it. A secret wonder possessed her; an instinctive rebellion. "Are you going to his parties?" she said. "I never will, and I won't see you sitting at the head of the table for him. What has come over you, auntie Bella?"

"It's not me only," said Miss Moray, clutching at her best argument, which she had nearly forgotten. "Your great friend Peter Campbell is on his side, and he's quite intimate at the manses."

Lauder knew. He had "got over" Peter Campbell by attending the Secession kirk and being greatly impressed by the young minister's preaching. He had called at the manse in the fields, and Mrs. Renwick, a wise and saintly woman, had taken to him. The Sunday school was to have a picnic in the den by-and-by, and gather raspberries—Lauder's own raspberries, to which she had always made people welcome, hitherto. She would not preside on this occasion. One must

let anything, everything go rather than strike one's colours. Dear old places!—There will never be any others like them; but it is better to leave them behind, and look back upon them as they used to be, than stay on, and make-believe, and feel a queer sickness at one's heart all the time.

"Of course you'll do as you please, auntie Bella. I daresay you have your reasons——"

"I have. I don't choose to quarrel and be shut out. And if the man's good enough for me, he's good enough for you, surely! Dear me, lassie, what do ye find to complain of? We've given ye the best of schooling, and your freedom in a lot of things, and if there's aught ye want that's not over-expensive, ye shall have it. I never did badly by ye, I think!"

It was a wail. Why did the girl not turn round and throw her arms about Miss Moray and bestow a kiss of acknowledgment? If Susan Campbell or Mrs. Renwick had said a third of it, in low, remonstrant tones, the young spirit would have melted. A look from either of them, or from Peter, would have turned the Lauder of rebellion into the blithe, open-hearted lassie. Why did Miss Moray's sudden appeal strike the ear only and leave one standing stiff by the table with a cold ache inside? To this day, Lauder asks herself that question, and the answer to it—for answer came—is not less singular than the inquiry itself was that June day.

She should have been desperately ashamed; and, somehow, she was not. She should have caught auntie Bella round the waist—a shapely, caressable-enough waist—and given her a kiss and said what she would have said to Susan Campbell. And she couldn't. Miss Moray sniffed and re-arranged things uselessly on the sideboard.

"Twenty-two years past," she muttered, "and I brought her all the way from England when her mother died. I need not have done it. Auld Jamie didna care a docken what became of her. Well, well!"

She stopped abruptly and stole a glance. Lauder was not listening. Her eyes were on the postman who was coming up the garden between the stocks and roses and other June delights. The girl did not go to meet him as usual, but let Jeannie come in and lay a letter on the table. Then a sweeping rose-colour, pure and delicate as could be, went to the roots of her golden-brown hair. Miss Moray turned away and dusted flower-glasses with a pocket-handkerchief. A crinkly sound told that the letter was being opened. Was this John Thomson's offer at last—and would missie take it if it were? Miss Moray breathed a vow as she pottered softly with her back to the room and watched, in the sideboard mirror, the slender, proud figure of the girl whom she had brought up. "Guid sake, gie her sense, and I'll do my part by her!"—that was the vow.

The letter was somewhat long—four closely-written pages in a neat, business hand. Lauder read every word of it carefully, and sat down with it on her lap and looked out of window into the glen.

"You need not trouble about me any more, auntie Bella. There's a good man in Baldragon will be delighted to have me in his house if I'll go to him. And I think I will."

The words lingered; so did the look into the mirror that reflected the room. How silent the glen was!

"Well, you'll have everything this world can give you, and good guiding to it," said Miss Moray very quietly. It was she who was pale, she who trembled a little, not the girl. "I might take him myself if he asked me." She tried to laugh. "But my day's over. You are young yet and have plenty of time before you. Still, it passes, and I wouldna care to see ye sewing patchwork, like Lady Jean, after all your offers."

"There's no fear," answered Lauder dreamily. "I shall never do anything for Ashludie. It's Baldragon I'm going to."

The letter lay open on her lap and she looked round the room. There was an old engraving over the mantelpiece—the execution of Queen Mary in Fotheringham Castle. The scene looked as incredible as it must have seemed to Mary herself. A tall black and white figure commanded

the stage on which some one's life-blood was to flow directly. But where was the victim? The woman behind, perhaps, who had turned her face to the wall. There was something strange about the whole thing. Lauder noticed the man particularly. For an executioner he didn't look at all bad—sort of trustworthy, you might say, as though he wouldn't hurt one any more than he could help. Lauder rose, drew herself up like Queen Mary, and looked at her letter. "Yours most faithfully, John Thomson," stood at the foot of the last page, very clear and neat, and above it a verse of poetry: the good man had a strong vein of sentiment in him. Lauder liked sentiment. She folded the sheet carefully.

"You're to take this one at last?" said the older woman, linking her fingers in a way she had —the Carter way, with the hands pressed out. Lauder's eyes came to her aunt's face and gleamed. The flush on her cheek, the keen light in her eye, would have meant in a Moray of the old time a call to the field, a buckling on of the armour. What did it mean in her, as she was, in the Craig that summer day?

"Yes, I'm to do it!" said a quick young voice. There—the die was cast—she had said it! How nice it is to have one's life fixed and settled! She went to the writing-table. Miss Moray watched and wondered. It was not her doing, anyway: no one could say so. The others would go mad,

of course, and the man down the road would take it upon him to say things, but he should have no reason to blame her. Providence was settling the matter; it was just a pure Providence, said the woman to herself. Then aloud:

"There's no hurry about him. He'll not seek any one else so long as your name is Lauder Graham, and you'd best be sure that you know your own mind."

"I'm going to answer his letter, and take it down to the train," answered Lauder, with the face of a high-bred child who has promised to be good.

"Well, well, it's your own doing, then. Dinna say ye had no advice. Tell him I'll give him his dinner any day he likes to come out, and then ye can see. There's no doubt ye'll be a great lady in Baldragon if ye take John Thomson. He can go into Parliament whenever he likes."

Lauder sat down and dashed into a long letter. She told her friend how the new laird had "come over" people, and how it appeared that he was going to keep two parishes in his pocket and turn them round as he liked, and it was a pity something could not be found for him to do in Baldragon since he was so much in need of employment. In fact, he was a church officer spoiled. After this Lauder sent her kind love to Miss Thomson, and said that auntie Bella hoped to see them both out to spend the day soon. And

she had enjoyed being at Crieff very much. She then signed herself his sincere friend, and remarked casually in a postscript that she was afraid he would find it tiresome to have to reckon with her whims and fancies, she had so many—at least, people seemed to think so. It was all written at top speed aud fastened up quick and taken down to the train, and that, if you please, was the way John Thomson was "accepted."

The young lady spent the rest of the day visiting an old shepherd on the other side of the hill. He was one of her particular friends, and she requisitioned some eggs to take to him. Miss Moray gave them without a word of objection.

"Ye can do what ye please for your folkies when ye have John Thomson's purse to dip into. He won't grudge it. And neither do I. Away ye go!"

The shepherd's cottage stands on the side of Dunwhinan, looking over the hollow which separates that historic height from the banks of the Coire valley. The bed of the hollow is a moss; that is (if you are a Teuton from head to heel and have forgotten your Crockett), a soft marshy place, either of peat made or peat in the making. Round the moss are the hillsides, cultivated, grassy, or heathery. The world is clean out of sight, yet may it almost hear the curlew

and the lapwing calling to it to cease sinning and come away to the wilderness, and the smoke of its furnaces can be seen from the shepherd's hut, staining the eastern sky. The charm of central Scotland lies in this contact of wilderness and city. Edinburgh has its Pentlands, Glasgow its Bens and lochs, and Baldragon builds villas on the slope of a hill that throws a glance to a dozen mountain lords. What can the cities of the nations say for themselves compared with this?

Solitude itself seemed to surround the cottage—solitude of open pasture running up to brown heather—solitude of open sky between two lines of hill; solitude of pathway going for more than a mile over moss and brae till, on the other side, Dunragit House and farm and village made a nest above the comings and goings of Strathcoire. The shepherd was on Dunragit. He was no longer able to go about but "hovered" in and out, in all weathers, and gave advice to his son who kept the sheep, and read "The Buik" and all "the papers" he could get his hands on, and some way or other knew more of what was going on in the world than many of the people who live in the thick of it. His wife worked in the fields, and their young daughter Lizzie was supposed to keep the house and watch her father. It was rather he who watched her. Even the wilderness may be a "world," and Lizzie was exceeding pretty.

Lauder's light figure came over the ridge and

down and across the moss. The shepherd, standing at his door for a blink of the bonnie evening, knew at once who it was: "the missie," who would listen to his long stories and tell him what Peter Campbell was saying about the church. When the minister came, or Peter, or "the missie," the old man lived again, for an hour, a life which had passed out of his grip as the "abeelity" had gone from his legs. But some day, he thought, when the weather was extra good, he might manage to "travel down" once more and appear in the bare kirk among the fields on a Communion Sunday, "the oldest member of session" and a sort of miracle. Then he would be ready to go if it pleased the Lord to take him. To have been forty years an elder in a U.P. congregation—a handful of "voluntaries" in a strath—and "never out of my place except when there was a death in the family," was more to this shepherd than the blue ribbon of the Garter.

Lauder came over a "moss bridge" and up the brae to the cottage, a low-pitched white-washed but-and-ben with the smallest of small windows, and bright flowers growing as it were of themselves against the walls. The shepherd bent his head to come through the doorway and stood up again, large and stiff and bony, an old knight of the wilderness. How many battles he had fought up there for the lives of silly sheep, none but himself knew.

"Well, missie, you've been away for your holidays?"

Voice and hand were aged, but not feeble; the eyes were large, in deep sockets; a hook nose and a rough beard made the rest of the face. Hugh Renwick had been afraid of this old man at first.

"Holidays, were they?" said Lauder. "It seems to me I was working pretty hard; there were so many folks to please. I think I'd rather stop a fortnight with you here."

"Aye, they say pleasurin' is hard work," answered the shepherd. "I never tried it but once, when their mother and me went to Baldragon for two days to see my sister; and we was baith glad to get hame again, to a settled way o' doing. That's years ago, when I could travel; but I've never wished to go again."

Lauder looked over the moss. Was it conceivable that a man *never* wanted to go farther than the Secession kirk? He spoke again as if to her thought.

"But we'll no' get the young folk to think so. They've so little use for their time, they seem to need changes to put it through. There's our Lizzie. She's but a bairn, and she seems like as if she canna rest. She maun hae a message to one place to-day, and another place to-morrow. Ye didna see her as ye came over the hill, did ye, Miss Lauder?"

The old man was not quite in his usual. His

wife—much younger than himself—was at the farm to-night, and Lizzie had gone to the nearest "shoppie," a mile away, for some trifle. "Her mother frets about her, whiles," said the shepherd. "I dinna let her ken how often the lassie's out o' sight an' hearin'. She canna take much harm in the daytime, an' she's never away frae the hoose after dark. But if ye see her, ye might drop a word, Miss Lauder. Tell her I'm gettin' far through wi' this world an' it disna take much to make me anxious.."

This was not like the shepherd at all. He had no story of old times to tell, no inquiries about the young minister or the new laird. He shook more than usual, and his sunken eyes looked out of their hollows to the brae where Lizzie ought to be appearing. Lauder resolved that on the first opportunity she would certainly drop a word to Lizzie. She waited with the old man a while, and then had to make her own way back—he standing to see her go out of sight, and still looking beyond her for Lizzie. A sense of something impending over that quiet, old-world cottage darkened the twilight for Lauder as she went home.

And perhaps something in her own heart made the evening seem bleak and dull.

XIII

A COUPLE OF SINNERS

"WHAT'S this of it?" said Mr. Rattray. He had come up on one of his daily errands and was just in time to see John Thomson walking out with Lauder. "Who's this you're having about the place?" he said. Any personable man in association with "the lassie" was a matter to be inquired into. And the two figures looked wonderfully matched as they went up the glen. The Baldragon manufacturer was tall and well built; he could play golf with anybody, and was a crack curler. Lauder's head came to his shoulder, and the pair were stepping out as if they meant to walk round the world. The laird peered out of his face at them.

"That's her man," said Miss Moray. She could have expressed the thing in a much more dignified way, but Mr. Rattray and herself always met on the basis of the vernacular. It is more expressive, and gives opportunities which are not to be found in high English. The mistress of

the Craig stood in her front door, the laird on the garden path, a brilliant July sun poured warmth over the glen and concealed the fact of a certain "northing" in the air. "That's her man," said Miss Moray. "She says so, anyway."

"Does *she* say so, or *you*?" demanded James Rattray. "She's terrible easy guided, your niece."

"You're the first person ever said so, I'm sure," answered the lady. Any one who knew her well would have seen a veiled something in her strong country-coloured face. Was it satisfaction, or doubt, or a shade of both? What Miss Moray was conscious of, just then, was a keen desire to shut the door in James Rattray's face for the tone in which he said "your niece." They watched the two figures go round the bend. In the stillness of the early afternoon their feet could be heard on the road, a steady, easy march. Mr. Thomson turned to say something, Lauder answered; she went light and free, her head up. But there was no looking back from the corner, no wave of the hand to Miss Moray. She went out of sight with her lover, her middle-aged, prosperous lover.

"The lassie has no idea where she is going, nor how the jaunt will end," said Rattray, in a grieved tone, when he had been told, in a tone of triumph, all "the provost's" qualifications, mental, moral, and material, which were really very solid in each department.

"That's all very good, but what's the history of the business?"

"Dear me! Can a pleasant gentleman like yon no' persuade a girl to fancy him? He's daft about her, and has been these two years."

"Maybe. He's not the only one."

"No. There's about a dozen, up and down. But he's a persevering character, and some o' them lose heart when she flytes them."

"That's true, I daresay," remarked Rattray.

"Of course it's true! She canna flyte John Thomson. He's too substantial; and, I tell you, Lauder Graham doesna care for any one she can laugh at."

"There's laughing and laughing," returned the laird. It didn't seem as if the aunt had much to do with it, and yet he could not believe in the affair. He fixed Miss Moray with those small, nondescript eyes of his which saw, if not everything, at any rate a good deal, and especially where Lauder was concerned.

"I'd be pleased if I could understand you, Miss Moray. You're a smart woman, and you mean to be honest——"

"I'm real obliged to ye for your opinion, Mr. Rattray."

"And ye manage it about as well as I do myself, which is not saying a great deal. If we were confessing our sins one to anither, you and me, there'd be something to tell, maybe."

Miss Moray was watching him as closely as he observed her. He wore a suit of grey nankeen and looked large, cool, even smart in a comfortable sort of way. She had on her best black satin and lace, to do honour to John Thomson, and between that and dinner cares was rather warm.

"I never professed to be perfect," she replied, "but I will say I've tried to do my best by everybody, and no one can do more. Taking everything into account, I dinna think any man or woman can complain o' being much the worse for me."

The laird gave her a very sharp look.

"You dinna mean them to be. That's where we're honest, you and me. But we're a couple of sinners, Miss Moray, for all that—a couple o' sinners." He stood with hands in side pockets, looking down at the garden path as if he saw something there. Miss Moray took a shiver.

"Sinners here, and sinners there! The pot canna call the kettle black, and we all need salvation, I suppose; but I can face the world as well as the most o' folk."

"I'm not denying it, mum; and yet there might be something ye'd rather keep your thumb on if ye could." He looked up suddenly; she, set and farmer-like, looked down on him from the doorstep. "A person may mean no harm, as ye say, and yet—— It's not what we mean, but what Some One else arranges that settles it, and He has a way o' His own, I've always heard."

Miss Moray glared.

"What are ye havering about?" she asked.

"Nothing at all, mum. I'm merely considering that things come home to roost, whiles, when the nights begin to draw down. Aye, do they!"

She was getting very "turk," he said to himself, but he didn't care; he would "gar" her leave the lassie alone. That was the main thing just now—the main thing. For the rest——

"Ye've taken to preaching sermons, it seems," said the mistress of the Craig.

"Eh, no: I haven't any right; but I've been a hearer lately. You should have been in the Secession kirk last Sabbath, mum. The young man gave us something new. He got me fair between the ribs, I tell you."

"Well, I'd have liked fine to see that done," said Miss Moray grimly. "You're a tough subject. What was he on? No' that I'm anxious to hear," she added quickly.

"But I'll tell ye, mum. It was 'There is nothing hid that shall not be revealed.'" Rattray's broad, sallow, pale face, full of a certain significance, confronted his neighbour. "He's a good lad, that minister, and I suppose he has no idea how awful he made it. Everything is to be raket up, he said; every mortal thing we've done, raket up and set out in the light o' day, just like a farm flitting. I wonder how we're to stand it, Miss Moray.

There'll be need for some rocks to cower under, I'm thinking."

She would have liked to turn him round and push him down the path and off her premises, but that would have been to throw up the post of domestic governess at the Tower which she had resumed, and was relishing nearly as much as ever. So she controlled herself, and only remarked with a very red face that there was need to be stepping indoors, the sun being "some fierce," and was the laird to come in and stay tea? It would be good for him to meet the future provost of Baldragon, she said. But Rattray declined this invitation.

"I'd be telling him to his face that he is a poacher," he said.

"And then she'd fly at ye, my man," returned Miss Moray.

"She might do that all the more because she knew just how the snare had been laid," was "the man's" last word. Miss Moray's only retort was to bang her front door, which she did so as to make the whole cottage tremble. For the matter of that, she was trembling herself. She could have given James Rattray a sounding "clout" over the ears.

He was moving slowly away, with his head down and his eyes almost folded up, when the door opened again, and the mistress came two steps after him.

"She says it's on no account to be spoken about. Mind that, Mr. Rattray! The Campbells are not to know—nor anybody. Lauder Graham is as proud as——"

"As any of the Morays," said the laird, turning on the speaker, with eyes that suddenly opened to an ordinary size. He fixed her a minute, then gave her his back, and went away with deliberate tread. The cottage door banged again.

XIV

THE MARRIAGE OF AMBITION

IN the Secession manse among the fields a young man, who knew nothing of Mr. Thomson's visit to the Craig, was making a lecture for the following Sabbath afternoon. The manse looks to the south and the study is in the west corner of it, with two windows, so that summer or winter, in fine weather, the sun shines into the little room most part of the day, and in bad weather the wind and rain beat against the glass until the study seems to be set out in the very midst of the storm, like a boat at sea. There are many corner studies in many manses where ministers sit by the hour together, "preparing" as they say, in every kind of weather, and every sort of state, fit or unfit. Not all of them have so wide a view as there is from the little square place where Hugh Renwick sat through nearly the whole of a hot July day. He had too much prospect before him, he used to say: it took his eyes from his books and desk and set him dreaming.

It had been so to-day. The strath had glowed with heat from early morning to evening. Haymakers, piling up "coles," turnip singlers, bending over late drills, grew scarlet and complained more than of the bitterest winter blast. Open doors and windows only emphasised the fact that, properly speaking, this was a day to spend in a shady corner with a book, feeling after things in a dreamy, happy way. But Hugh Renwick had a task before him, and could not afford to let stray sermon seed float about in his mind till it caught on to something. Lecturing through the First Book of Samuel—which he was doing at that time—was as rigorous in its way as a course of Euclid. You must take every salient passage and every problem as they came, and solve them, somehow, by help of certain recognised authorities. Such was the case a very few years ago, in Scotland, when "U.P.s" were U.P.s, and "Frees" were Frees, and only the 'Stablished did as it liked. Now, we are into a new century, and all is different. There are no problems; you go as you please, and things settle themselves. If a passage bothers a man, he has only to get rid of the passage, or alter it to suit himself; and proceed. The authorities now recognised are very much in favour of that practice, and a sort of theology-made-easy has been invented—in Germany, of course, where education is so advanced—by which nothing is really necessary except an "open

mind" and the very latest opinions of the most agile experts.

Hugh Renwick, however, did not know how to save himself. He had the Huguenot and the Covenanter both behind him, as you know, and he held himself bound to work straight through First Samuel and find a message from the Lord in every line of it. He was not one of the light brigade which spends a week among floating thistledown and on Sunday, finding that it refuses to cohere, comes blithely with an old sermon to congregations that, even in the country, have been reading fresh news in "the papers" and know that an editor can't reprint, verbatim, last Saturday's leading article. Hugh Renwick belonged to the order of conscientious fools who imagine that "good work is bound to tell," and though it doesn't, would rather do it and be lost with it, than be saved the worldly-easy way. And so this glowing July afternoon, while John Thomson dined at the Craig and afterwards walked with Lauder to a bit of moor where she set him to gather blae-berries, the young fellow in the Secession manse bent over his writing-table, trying very hard to make a lecture.

It must needs be practical. He had been troubling the minds of the Whitehouses folk with some discourses in which Optimism and Pessimism and other strange cattle put out their horns, and the course on First Samuel was started as a relief

to a somewhat mystified congregation. Unless it were practical it would be no relief at all. A "real homely discourse" was the thing wanted, with the picturesque in it and the touching, too. Whitehouses knew Mr. Renwick as a young man who could be "vera impressive"—in a somewhat mournful way—and it liked him to be so. The Scottish people is not exactly "the weepingest nation upon earth," but in literature it loves to be moved by the sorrows of the race. Whitehouses quarries the sandstone and ploughs the deep strath soil, and it likes ministers who go deep into the human heart and plough the soul of man.

"Shublime and pinted, touchin' and pathetic" was the verdict of the senior elder on Hugh Renwick's preaching when the young man was called, and the congregation expected him to live up to that encomium. He did not, himself, think much either of his own pathos or his own picturesqueness, but he believed it possible to be "vigorous" and drive a straight furrow. He had been rather vigorous the last two Sabbaths, according to all accounts, and he wished to deepen the impression.

So, on coming to the verse, "*And Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David*," he struck out "The Marriage of Ambition," and went to work. There was plenty to say. Young farmers are not unapt to make marriages of that kind. It is well to

warn them—well to warn anybody, one's self included, whose heart strays in directions where the sense of duty cannot follow. He was not going to care for anything but being useful.

And then he "stuck," which is a thing that will happen in all weathers, and just when it is least expected. Neither the practical, nor the picturesque, nor the pathetic were at command, They seemed to be as far away as the western hills.

He rose and stood at the side window, looking up the valley. The path of his duty lay narrow as a road through a wee glen and seemed likely, in its own way, to be as steep. You can do some hard travelling in a very small "dene" and a short day. Young Renwick suddenly saw himself plodding up a water-course of a track with the little birks growing less and less till the roots of bracken were near as big, and the sheep looked too large for the vegetation, and still the shepherd climbed, because that was his duty, to go after the sheep into the wilderness and make them understand why he called them.

What chances other fellows had, in the place they called "the world"! Mere country loons, who stepped away with small bundles on their backs, the poor Davids of a country-side, and saw service and won honours, and wrote their names in the records of empire, and got fair ladies for their wives, and made channels for the stream

of history. As Hugh Renwick gazed after these achieving figures—there were cousins of his own among them—they seemed very brilliant; the shepherd toiling up the gully was a poor creature compared to them. Was not the laird right when he said that a man needed more room for his feet than he could have in that "corner of the vineyard" known as Whitehouses, or any such corner? Was not some one else right when she spoke of "ministers" with a fine disdain, as having no chance themselves, and none to offer to a woman?

"*Now Michal, the king's daughter, loved David.*" It was not David the shepherd, but David the conqueror of Goliath who won this prize. Hugh Renwick wished he were one of his own ancestors with a battle to fight in France or on the Scottish moors. Michal might love him or leave him, then: he would not care very much either way.

A soft sound approached the study door: his mother slowly pulling herself up the stairs by holding on to the rail and climbing: that was how she had to do it. Once at the top she would be at the study door too, the landing was so narrow. Hugh sat down at the table and took up his pen again. His frail old mother, married late and "never strong," how would it be with him in the wayside manse when her step ceased on stair and passage and her pale worn face could never appear again in the doorway, full of an indescribable cheer and courage, the very soul of religion, giving him,

as it often did, text and sermon together? He watched for her coming in. A fear caught him. The blow must fall some day—who could tell when?—and then he would be alone.

She trailed in, breathless and triumphant. Always one climb more, after so many!

"There's a note from Ashludie," she said, taking the nearest chair. She had been picking fruit, ready to boil, and her thin fingers were roughened with that and many other household chores, but there was nothing disordered about her: the composure and propriety of the country manse lady never failed Mrs. Renwick, no matter how spent she might be.

"They're wanting an answer," she said, and Hugh opened his note. The name Ashludie was never spoken without making his heart beat faster.

"Well, Hughie?" said his mother presently. She thought that he was day-dreaming.

"It's the laird, wanting us to dinner on Monday."

"Well, you can go, I suppose? You've no meeting that night."

"It's you as well, mother."

"Oh, me! I don't keep my carriage. It's good for me that the manse is so near the kirk."

"That is what you told him the other afternoon, and he bade you keep his horses exercised. He will send for you, mother, and of course, send you home."

"Then I'll be very pleased to go—if you care about it." The one piece of luxury the dear woman had a longing for was a carriage. Not a little pony carriage such as many a country minister kept, and was lawful to wish for, and hardly to be called a luxury; but in her soul Mrs. Renwick knew what pleasure it gave her to sit in a well-hung barouche, among cushions and rugs, behind "a pair," and a fine pair! To this extent the world had a grip of her. There was no other point available in her chastened, cheery nature.

"It's very kind of Mr. Rattray," she said. "He's a mindful sort of person. He likes your preaching, Hugh."

The young man smiled. For the only son of a devoted mother, he was singularly unconceited.

"He likes *you*, and so one can feel sure of his good heart. He means very well."

"I think he does well, Hugh. The Campbells are very pleased with him."

Hugh smiled again, and then turned serious.

"He's my Mephistopheles, mother: he tempts me to think too much of myself—to court the world."

"Oh, well,"—Mrs. Renwick thought of her own taste for a carriage and pair—"there are folk enough in Whitehouses, small as it is, to keep down your corruption, Hugh. Dr. Candlish, poor man, might be spoiled among the Free Kirk

ladies in Edinburgh, with their presents of whole salmon and going down on their knees when he asked a blessing at tea. But the U.P.s have never been guilty of the sin of flattery."

Hugh quite agreed with that statement, but something else engaged him.

"You think I should go, then?" he said, with his face to the window.

"Well—why should you not?"

"Oh!—no reason, I suppose. He's a hearer of mine. He seems to expect the Craig ladies."

A faint, pretty colour rose on the mother's hollowed cheeks. She had heard more about John Thomson than Hugh had, and she knew Lauder Graham as a motherly woman knows a girl who is near her, but not her own daughter.

"Will they go, do you think?" she said reflectively, as if this were the main point. Hugh did not move. Some part of his wide prospect engaged his attention.

"You'll need to write an answer, Hughie: the girl is waiting."

"Please tell me what to say, mother. I leave it to you."

The delicate rose faded; she seemed even to turn a little pale.

"Not if it will disturb you, my lad. The Lord's work is your charge, and will be your comfort when all else fails. Your old mother is very sure of that——"

He nodded. She saw the lines of his face tighten as they do when a man is ordered to the front.

"But you have few changes here, and maybe——"

Maybe. A girl may choose to be in a place where you do not expect her; an evening hour may change two lives. Who can tell what Providence has in store?

"Do you think so?"

He spoke dreamily. It was no answer to anything his mother had said, and she watched him as women must needs watch men, even those they have borne. It was "not always easy understanding Hugh."

"Well, I might go up for a wee while. Most likely there will be no one but ourselves and the Kilpirn manse people."

He took up his pen and scribbled a note, and a faint smile came to his mother's face. He glanced over as he enclosed the sheet—a queer, troubled, excited glance it was—and catching her observant look flushed red, like the boy he was. Like a boy he hurried past her with a touch of a hand on the face where that little smile lingered.

"I'll take it down. Sit you in the easy-chair, mother, and 'mind' me, and I'll get something done yet," he said, eager and shamefaced.

His mother always brought help with her; a strengthening air, a sense of powers, large and

simple and fortifying, like the hills and the sky. He ran down with the message and came back and bent to his lecture, and the mother sat in the worn leathern chair—not so very "easy"; never had been—watching him with a still face and tears behind the stillness. Her husband's books surrounded her; old brown things which she had dusted many a time, mixed now with the newer ones her son had been able to buy. Not very many of them, he thought, though to her they seemed numerous, and she was inclined to be just a trifle jealous of them and the places they occupied on the shelves. The old ones were good guides, she said to herself, though by this time mostly broken-backed or split at the top. The newer ones she was not so sure of; they looked rather lawless. Ewald was something of a terror to her, and a later eminent authority she held as "a vain person." Yet another she would have burned in the kitchen fire if she had known what he was up to, but the folds of his professional mantle were wide and long, and only a few people at that time guessed what shrunk members of orthodoxy were covered. Certainly Mrs. Renwick did not, and anyway she hoped her son was in no great danger. He had good old Dick and Eadie and John Brown to guide him, and Spurgeon and Parker and Maclaren to furnish him with hints. Mrs. Renwick saw him referring to these fountain heads and was content.

Now Michal, the king's daughter, loved David.

The small room was full of golden light which dazzled; then a luminous after-glow was like a new soft day coming. The pen scratched; downstairs old Janet fussed about and did next to nothing, laboriously. The mother had a dream in her eyes. It was time some one came to the manse; one able to guide the house well and also to speil the braes and go in and out of the cottages and farms in the old homely way but with a freshness, too, an air of the new time which had come since Relief and Secession, Burgher and Anti-Burgher fought their battles. Dear as past journeys to the traveller and past campaigns to the soldier, were these old struggles to the woman whose father and husband lived in them. Will any souls ever again, in Scotland, cleave to religious memories and symbols as souls of the nineteenth century clave to "Secession" and "Disruption" and all the thoughts belonging to them—thoughts homely and solemn and sacred as life itself? It is not likely. Or else, it can only be after fallings away and vanishings, after sense of loss and emptiness, after a new scorn has created a new passion of faith: and of these the beginning only is visible.

Mrs. Renwick had the wisdom that comes to many a quiet woman. She knew there were thoughts in her boy's round dark head which he would never "bother" her with; which even a

wife might have to guess rather than learn. She knew that the world of her love and loyalty was not quite so much to him as it was to her and had been to his father. Everything changes, and it's natural, said the mother to herself. Hugh needed a companion of his own time beside him, and the people would take more interest. Suppose a young lady, who had a different up-bringing—well, yes, even Episcopalian!—it would not really matter in the long run if she had "the root of the matter" in her, and loved Hugh and his work and people, and gave herself unreservedly to him to cheer him on his way through "the ministry." In Scotland, the country of clan usages, a wife always adopts her husband's church, and the Episcopalianism of Dunragit, though "high" enough in the clergyman, could not be held to infect every one who attended him: certainly not a nice girl who always took an interest in Mrs. Renwick's old tales and reminiscences. The mother slid easily over what seemed a mere accident. Her dream spun itself as she lay back in the stiff chair. It was a pretty web, but where did she get the material? A woman who has managed three manses and seen trouble, and disapproves of modern fiction, ought not to sit weaving vain imaginations.

Hugh startled her out of them.

"What do you think of this, mother? Is it too sensational?"

He read his title and gave her a sketch of

the discourse, a little anxious what might be thought of it, but a little proud, too. He seemed to himself to be getting modern: a thing he very much wanted to be.

"It is rather sensational, don't you think?" she said.

Mrs. Renwick had never heard of "painting the town red," but "The Marriage of Ambition" sounded too much like advertising in the papers and other proceedings which the old ministers did not countenance. She was a woman of conservative principles, and she thought Hugh ventured over far. She felt how it would sound —how some of the old folks would look under their eyelids and shut up their big country lips. Still, it might have an effect, and she was also a woman of liberal mind.

"You're not to be always doing things just as they were done fifty years back. It would be a pity if our Church"—you should have heard such an one as Mrs. Renwick say "our Church"— "it would be a pity if our Church grew old-like and stiff in the joints. It would come to be like me getting up the stair—a hitch on to a rail, and a hoist up a step or two, when a fleet foot could be at the top and away farther."

And so she let him have his modernity, and even, presently, began to take some pride in it.

"There's no doubt," she said, "the Apostle Paul was some careless about the way of saving

souls providing they were really saved, and showing it. He'd have no great respect for our rules and forms of precedure, I daresay; and, perhaps, he *might* advertise an evening lecture: there's no saying." And she hoped that young Wilson of Northfield, who was reported to be looking out for a rich wife, would take "The Marriage of Ambition" to himself.

So the lamp was lit, and the preacher's pen drove on like a thing bewitched and going of itself. This was as it should be. If Hugh wrote "vigorously," he would read vigorously, too, and even leave the paper, here and there, and make his mother and the people happy. She patted his shoulder softly and slipped away to make a nice little supper ready against the finish. Mrs. Renwick had not been fifty years at her part without learning it. Ministers preparing discourses are to be treated like prophets in a cave. Take them, and feed them on bread and water—the best, of course—and tell them the word of the Lord is with them. If, after that, they don't preach well, it's not your fault. The rest of the evening the study might have been a den on the side of Schehallion for all there was to disturb a train of thought, and downstairs a cripple woman, limping quietly from part to part of her small domain, was engaged, not only with supper, but with that picture of the bright young helper who was to come and renovate the manse, fulfilling a new age

in the old spirit of pious loyalty. The more Mrs Renwick painted her picture, the more she believed in it. The helper would surely be given!

In the middle of a twilight strath, with opaline gleam all along the hills behind Ashludie, and the fairiest of fairy stars glinting overhead, there shone also a quiet, penetrating eye of light, a thought looking into the shadows of things—into the nesting of the woods, the hills that flowed to the north and west, the river going to the city and the sea—and asking what life there might be for a man in the valley of time.

XV

DISTINGUISHED COMPANY

IT is needful to confess a sad truth. Lauder Graham would not accept the laird's invitation to dinner, and the party fell as flat as the proverbial flounder. Miss Moray retired from it in something like hysterics, Mrs. Renwick with all pleasure taken out of her carriage drive, and her son, shutting his lips very tight over something, resolved to keep away from Ashludie and the laird and all good-natured but unsettling "company," and "stick to work." He would set a-going a general visitation of the countryside in the interests of "Welfare of Youth" scheme. He would read Greek every morning and Hebrew every evening. He would grow some chrysanthemums for the autumn show and try to get a prize. Above all, he would be more attentive to pulpit preparation, and be less "bound to the paper." That would please his dear old mother and his people, and, perhaps, in a little while, a "call" would come, lifting him out of these fields and

roads which seemed all to run up to Ashludie and the glen of Kilpirn.

Mr. Rattray himself, mortified to a degree, and openly using language about Miss Moray—it was "her blame," he declared—went off next morning to a Highland hotel to rub out the impression. Returning in a fortnight, he found the Craig shut up and the ladies off to St. Andrews, where Lauder was to learn golf in distinguished company. The Kilpirn manse was let for August and September to some friends of Lord Pitfour, and the young man "down-by" seemed to be always either studying or gardening, or having to do pastoral visitation. Mrs. Renwick was less cheery than at first, and though he gave her many a drive she did not seem to benefit by them—so true is it that one's own dream is the best chariot even for the lame, and hope is better than horses. The laird came regularly to church every Sunday morning and sat in the manse pew, and gave handsomely to the collection, and yet there was no other day like the one when "The Marriage of Ambition" was delivered. Doubtless it was true, as James Rattray said over and over again to Mrs. Campbell:

"We canna want that lassie. She's the life o' the districk!"

Susan Campbell would answer:

"She is that, sir!"

And then the laird would mutter something

about "that Miss Moray!" and "I'll win to the bottom o' the haill concern yet." In September, when his glass-houses and orchards were full of ripening fruits and sweet warmth within old walls, he went off again, leaving Peter to do what he liked "with the stuff," but with orders to telegraph as soon as ever Miss Lauder came home.

She and her aunt were staying at John Thomson's new castle of Glenroy, in a valley not so very far away, and the somewhat distinguished company was continuing: a party for the moors, in short, and not without political bearings, too. Little Miss Thomson, suffering a constant malady of shyness, leaned hard on Miss Moray, who found a new sphere of generalship that far surpassed Ashludie and anything done there in Sir Alec's time. She almost forgot Sir Alec and the grey pepper-pot turret, and the tales of Sir Patrick and Lady Nickie. A month of Highland hospitality, with people coming and going, and a fine table, and a staff of servants, intoxicated the mistress of the Craig, who loved "a braw way o' doing," and would never have been found on the Stewart side after a Hanoverian coronation. She almost completely forgot James Rattray, and mentally snapped her fingers when a shadowy remembrance of him and his queer talk did occur. He was not "the man" now, but only "*that* man" or "that body"; a mere country carle given to claiking and spying where

he had no business. "Lauder Graham and all concerning her is far past him and his meddling, praise be thanket!" said Miss Moray in the glen that was not at the back of Ashludie.

It was not half so pretty a glen, to tell the truth; but Miss Moray never compared them. She could hardly restrain her satisfaction within decent limits.

Nor did Lauder give any trouble. For the first time, she and auntie Bella appeared to be at one, to understand each other. Miss Moray said to herself over and over again:

"It's a' right! It's as right as it can be! I've brought the girl up and I should know her. She likes a stir, and she likes grandeur. She'll never content herself in a small way—never! It's not in her nature."

This was true: how true, Miss Moray knew better than anybody. *It's not in her nature* expressed a good deal. Lauder Graham was not one to spend her days in a small corner fenced with limitations, and any one who saw her at Glenroy during those six golden weeks might well have thought that Providence had been kind and Miss Moray wise. The girl moved as in a dream, with a slender stateliness, a calm decision, neither bluff nor scornful, that sat well upon her. John Thomson was not always up from Baldragon. Markets claimed him twice a week, and when he came he was the host and man of affairs, hardly

a "lover." Besides, there are ways of loving. This dry-looking, expert Baldragon manufacturer had a glow at the heart for his town, his political party, his church—and Lauder Graham—but it burned inwardly, not out, and the very fact that his feeling for the girl had once or twice startled himself and begun to take the lead over the other interests, made the good man shy. He treated her very respectfully, though with homely freedom. This suited her. She seemed to herself to have come from school to an elder sister and brother, who could not do enough to make her feel at home with them. And she was enjoying herself immensely, though, to be sure, as in a dream; always in a dream. Luxury and service, outdoor life in glorious weather, an auntie Bella continually at the height of good-temper and capable of reckless things in the way of providing chiffons—these were not the elements of life as Lauder Graham had known it, despite the attention of a country-side and a string of sweethearts. They were unfamiliar, but they were fascinating. One can easily take to this sort of dreaming. When it becomes real it will find one prepared.

No one had the least idea how many hours the girl spent at the window of her own room, or in a pinewood above the house, lapped in the haze of a borderland all warm and sunny which hid "the lassie" of Sir Alec and the past as well as the provost's lady of the future.

The golden weeks went by, and Miss Moray returned to the Craig to answer questions and preen her feathers and defy the laird; but Lauder Graham was invited by some new friends to stay in Baldragon, and October found her there, drinking deep of gaiety in the shape of lectures, concerts, entertainments, a bazaar or two. Bazaars are a staple trade of that city, and afternoon tea an occupation in itself. Lauder drank tea in all the suburbs by turns; heard the newest celebrity lecture, and helped to pull him to pieces afterwards; made the benevolent John Thomson buy a few dozen raffle tickets, an investment which brought him no return except a bride doll and a huge amount of teasing; and on the head of it all had two fresh victims to her own gun, so to speak. Then she went back to the glen of Kilpirn with a ring on her finger and the shoes of restlessness on her feet. The dream had changed somewhat; and Susan Campbell and the laird lay in wait for her.

Lauder knew that she would have to give account of herself to the Campbells some time, and on the principle of getting it over she stepped down to see them the first evening.

The housekeeper's room was brilliantly in order, and Susan was mending a carpet; Peter had some accounts in hand. When they heard the light knock on the outer door, and the dog giving little yaps of recognition, they knew who was there.

"What 'll we say to her?" asked the wife. Underneath her calm there were bundles of nerves ready to quiver; and Miss Lauder could be very high if you meddled with her when she had made up her mind.

"Wait till ye hear what she says herself," answered Peter. "Maybe a look at her 'll dae."

He went to open the door. The carpet slid off Mrs. Campbell's knee.

Lauder came in, slim and clear and stately. There was "a difference on her"; she had been "in the world," said Susan Campbell to herself, and her heart sank. Was it, indeed, all settled and past praying about? No, things could never be at that; never in this world. The good woman looked very closely into the face of her "lassie."

"I could almost think ye'd grown, Miss Lauder," she said, with a note of reserve in the tenderness.

"Perhaps I have," answered the small firm lips. "Auntie says the same, now that she sees me in the Craig again; and you all look at me as if I were changed."

She was changed! They sat down together. Peter could not take his eyes from her; the dog pushed his nose into her hand; Mrs. Campbell laid down her glasses.

"Changes will come," she said. "And when they're sent to us they're sure to be a' richt. It's when we make them wersels that we need to be cautious."

Lauder played with the dog and the fire crackled—wood from the den of Ashludie gave out delicious odour and jewel-like colours. Outside, it was the quietest October night that ever was. The young lady smiled a little.

"In the country you are always cautious," she said. "In town, they believe in going ahead; and it's lightsome."

Squeezed and quaint and silent this Tower of Ashludie; awfully silent the braes and dens outside it. How did people go on living whole winters here, with the world lying in sight of them and the trains rushing to and fro? It was more than quaint; it was solemn! One should have two houses, certainly, if one hoped to get the good of life, and they should be fitted with beautiful electric lights everywhere, and nice bathrooms, and all the rest of the new things that are so convenient. Lauder dashed into a story of her doings in Baldragon—some of her doings—the bazaars and the concerts. Her visits to the theatre were not for present hearers. She embroidered a little, and it sounded very lively. The plain people who had taken her by the hand when she was a little child sat and listened; they smiled and were very interested, but Lauder knew they were judging and watching as they had never judged and watched her. She dashed along, and then stopped abruptly, and no one spoke for a whole minute.

"Aye," said Peter, shifting his feet, "aye, aye,

ye've been in the world, Miss Lauder." He might have said so had he been told of the plays she had seen. He went on, "Ashludie 'll be nothing to ye, now; ye would na think muckle o' Balmore, even; ye'll be getting a Balmore o' your ain, one of these days."

The young lady sat very still and straight. Susan Campbell glanced from one to the other. "Ye shouldna say that, Peter," she murmured.

"Well—I'll say this, then!" He turned, with a Hieland throw and a look at Lauder's hand. "Is your heart here, or in Baldragon, missie?"

Her face was pale and high; the dog crept close.

"I insist on knowing," said Peter, sitting like an Auld Licht elder in a presbytery. "Tell 's the truth, Miss Lauder. Ye've promised yersel. Have ye any love for that man whose ring ye wear?"

Lauder rose to go.

"I am very fond of Mr. Thomson," she said. "He is the kindest man I know; much kinder than you, Peter."

The gardener rose too, authority in his face and in his voice. Oh! but his heart was sore.

"I'm as kind to ye this night as if I were your father, lassie, and I say to ye that your heart's not your own, nor is it Mister Thomson's, and if ye go to him like that, shall I tell ye what ye'll be in the sight o' God Almighty?—you'll be nae wife at all, but just a bought woman."

Susan Campbell put out her hand.

"Hush, my man, hush!" she said. Tears broke through the calm of her face and began to roll down. Peter drew himself to his long, lean height.

"If I were to hush now I would have to give account hereafter," he declared. "You know what you said yourself, yesterday, my woman,—that if Miss Lauder cared for yon man above all others ye'd see it in her face. Well!—Did ye see it?"

He was cruel as well as rude; he turned from the one to the other, and Lauder walked out. Peter was for going home with her.

"You shall not!" she said. "The collie is a gentleman. He shall go."

Peter put his hand on her shoulder as they stood under the starlight and the shadow of the hill in the old courtyard. It may be permitted to him to believe that he understood Miss Lauder and knew what the case required—knew his own right as having been more than any one else her father. It was easy to fall back into the old ways now that her face and her proud young look were hidden.

"Lassie," he said, "my dear lassie!" and his deep voice broke. "I'll insult ye again and again till I gar ye think what ye are doing. It's not for you, Miss Lauder, to marry the world and the things of the world——"

"I am going to marry a good man, Peter, and you know it!"

"I know that he's trusting to you, Miss Lauder; but can ye trust to yoursel'? If ye take the wrong road in life, my lassie, ye'll turn into one o' thae hard, proud women-folk that one sees, whiles, in their carriages, driving and girning, and the provost 'll no' like ye, then; he's a real, good, well-meaning man, as ye say."

A slim figure went across the court; the dog and Peter had it to themselves. It seemed to Campbell that he and his Shushan were going to break their hearts, like many another pair, over the young creature who had been their pride. He stumbled indoors and sat down heavily by the fire. Susan was wiping away tears which refused to be checked. They were very old-fashioned people, and they believed that marriage without the supreme choice of Love spells disaster for a high-spirited girl. They believed that in some mysterious way God guides a woman to the path He means her to tread.

XVI

AN EVENING OF ADVENTURES

IT was a dark November evening. The town of Baldragon lay on its long bank, above the estuary, a crowd of walls and roofs and chimney-stacks. Trains ran in and out of it along the waterside; the masses of shadow that seemed to compose the place were sprinkled with irregular groups of lights which left large patches invisible, like a nebulous dream figure ringed and girdled with jewels and all its drapery black. Here and there a glittering line ran up the breast and ended as if in folds of cloth; elsewhere a bracelet curved about an unseen arm. Within the spread form a life breathed murmurously; over it a canopy hung, soft, impenetrable, just so far lifted that between it and the compact yet tumbled town there might flow the air of sea and hill, mingling; an air so different from its own. Above the pressed buildings, the narrow streets, and narrower wynds, with close beyond close, hovered the cloud which they made for themselves, and between came the

inspiration from neighbouring sea and mountain. It was calm and benign this evening. The powers were not contending as they often did for the task of purifying Baldragon, but united gently in lulling it to a night's rest—the long night of November, the short night of a factory town.

The clock above the three big churches in the midway of Baldragon chimed a quarter to eight. The ferry-boat came in to its landing-stage, and one train ran up from the coast suburbs, another along the valley, roaring under the cliff at the west end and steaming in among the coal-stays and wood-yards of the centre. High above rose the dim, jewelled shape of the town, and people streamed about the skirts. Various things were arranged for. At the theatre a star company was to give "Charley's Aunt," or "Miranda's Brother-in-law," or something of that sort. At the Pitfour Hall, a well-known traveller and his "limelight views" would bring together the citizens in bulk, to hear him and see his views and themselves. A woman evangelist was to address one meeting, and a political speaker another. Besides, there were "soireés"—those hardy annuals that flourish with great persistence from November to April. By eight o'clock, bags of tea-bread and people perspiring over them would be fairly numerous at the soireés; the lecture-hall would be full of folk and draughts: the evangelist would be introduced with one set of compliments, and the political

speaker with another. In short, the public health of Baldragon would be undermined in the usual very moral or diverting ways, with clergy, scientific teachers, medical men, all calmly assisting. At half-past ten people would streak away home to be aroused from sleep by a pandemonium of steam whistles at half-past five.

In a first-class compartment of the Insch train as it swung down the strath, two men were making acquaintance with each other. They were neighbour lairds, but not yet on visiting terms, only the younger one knew the other's name, and there was a half-curious, half-careless amusement in his face as he said to himself:

"Odd carle, this old fellow from Africa! Wonder what he's going to make of himself? Thinks he's quite a big pot, by all accounts—not that he looks the character."

Perhaps not. It was still a shaggy and somewhat loose overcoat that arrayed his substantial form, and the dignity which could not be denied to him was a homespun sort. The other, for his part, was neither homespun nor dignified, but had a certain jauntiness about his well-knit, slender figure and in his dress the easy smartness of a wealthy Baldragon man who takes his own point of view, not that of Piccadilly, and clothes himself to suit the market or the shooting-lodge. His club is situated over against the Exchange, and he is never seen in a lady's drawing-room before

half-past six of an evening. Earlier attendance than that is for ministers only, or some very exceptional event. Such a man was John Thomson. He walked in the ways of his father, old Willy Thomson, who created the big "works" in Rock Brae and with them a large piece of the trade of Baldragon. Such, also, to a certain extent, was Fleming Guthrie, always called "young Guthrie" because he belonged to a third generation while some of the first were still alive. Like others of his own time, he combined the parts of leading manufacturer and county gentleman, and found much satisfaction in the blend. They are all men of the world, the Baldragon potentates. Old and young, they travel and buy pictures and know about new books and speculations, and could give points to the Piccadilly man any day. Young Guthrie only went in for the county character more than some of them and cultivated politics on a newer side as a Democratic Conservative: the older race were Radicals to a man. Guthrie liked his own choice, and felt that it showed lucidity. To be lucid and cosmopolitan was his particular ambition.

"Pleasant, lively chap. Takes things easy—knows a lot, or thinks he does," was the report taken of him by the older man's small-set, folded-in eyes. They passed it on to a wide mouth that clinched on it and a big chin seemed to stow it away for future use.

"Going in to the lecture?" said Guthrie. His neighbour amused him.

"No, I've had as much Africa as I care for." —The distinguished traveller had been on the Lakes. "I'm going to the Weavers' Hall. Can you tell me where that is?"

"Certainly. It's in the Cadger-gate. What's going on there to-night?"

"Some sort of political meeting. There's to be an address. I thought I'd come in."

He spoke seriously, as though something important were to come of it; and so there was, if he had only known. The younger man's face —it was rather striking, with its bright hair and beard and strongly marked lines—flickered with the same careless amusement as before.

"An address on what?" he said. A Baldragon man, however cosmopolitan, seldom gives information until he has put a question of his own. It's the safest way, and allows one something for the trouble; besides, they like to know all that's going on. Young Guthrie, however, could ask a question nicely, though, after the manner of the town, he did it plump. His voice was very pleasant, with a gentle fulness in it—a Perthshire voice, trained, as his face was a Perthshire hill-face, refined and cleared of the old windy colour. The contrast of pale skin and coppery hair with blue eyes made him a picturesque sort of fellow. He wore brown tweed under a fine overcoat, and a bit of bright blue in a necktie.

"An address on what?" His tongue suggested the Gaelic of his mother's forebears. It had the gentle, almost plaintive, softness one so often hears in Scotland. Really, Fleming Guthrie was very interesting.

"The advertisement says, 'The New Redemption,'" answered Mr. Rattray. "Having no family, I'm quite inclined to give some assistance where there's a good cause."

"Lots of good causes in Baldragon! We're great at philanthropy here. Do you mean to say you haven't been applied to yet?"

The new-comer acknowledged with some pride that he got circulars and letters most days and found a good deal of occupation in turning them over, talking to the Campbells or the Kilpirn minister about them, and answering them, with "enclosures." Mr. Rattray was quite proud of the amount of business he was doing in this line. It kept him busy, he said; and Fleming Guthrie smiled again and said oh, no doubt! the business would grow fast if he gave to everybody. Then the young man explained who he was, himself, and that he lived at Dunragit, except when he wasn't there, and hoped Mr. Rattray would be a friend of his as well as a neighbour. He added that for his part he didn't worry about the state of the world, but he might go into Parliament some day, all the same; and he was probably the only man within the bounds who had never

proposed to Lauder Graham—"Whom you know, of course, Mr. Rattray?" James Rattray said he did, and concluded, more decidedly than before, that Fleming Guthrie was a very agreeable specimen of light weight. He put no faith in the statement about Lauder Graham, but it happened to be true, all the same.

The train rolled into the station. Young Guthrie trimmed his beard, adjusted his overcoat, and offered to show his neighbour the way to the Weavers' Hall. "And now I think of it, who's to speak at this meeting?" he said. "Our lively oracle, D. H., I suppose?"

Rattray was not yet acquainted with this Baldragon celebrity. A Mr. Beecham was to give the address, he said. This woke up Fleming Guthrie.

"Beecham? Oh, then I'll go with you! I didn't know he was in town. They say he's on for a Scottish constituency, and I'd like very well to see what sort of fly he baits his line with. This way, Mr. Rattray."

A number of people had come in to attend the lecture. They looked at Fleming Guthrie and his companion. "Not exactly a match, are they?" said some one. Guthrie did not mind. Baldragon men are accustomed to being seen in the street with homely figures, and he felt quite obliged to his neighbour for letting him know about Beecham. The constituency which that gentleman was ogling

was the same that the young laird of Dunragit had thoughts of representing when an opportunity came: Baldragon, to wit.

They came out to an open space where docks and streets meet, and Guthrie turned along a winding central thoroughfare.

"Trouble?" he said. "No, really! I want to take a squeezing of Beecham on my own account. If he's dry I can use my ticket for the lecture yet. You've come in for the night, I suppose?"

Mr. Rattray had, and they agreed to be at the same hotel and go about Baldragon in the morning, to give the new man his bearings. He stepped out at a pace much beyond his usual. This raid on a lamp-lit winter town was quite a fresh experience. For a week or two back he had searcely been to say enjoying himself. There had been a suspicion of dullness, loneliness, or something about his mansion-house and policies. It was not "the country" merely. How could the valley of Strathcoire seem over quiet, even in November, to a man who knew what it was to sit alone in a trader's go-down with the dead body of his young partner and hear the everlasting surf, as it were of eternity, beating on the edge of time, and screw up his courage to go out and dig a grave? No; but, strangely, the memory of the one began to come up in the pleasant calm of the other. And Lauder Graham's marriage was always coming up. The laird could not

gossip with Susan Campbell, or go round to the Kilpirn manse, without debating once more of this girl and her destiny. As for the other manse, the subject was tabooed there, and all the more thought of. It was serious, down there—serious with the Campbells—and to Rattray the most "akward" matter conceivable. He said to himself every evening that he would go to John Thomson yet, "as one business man to another," but some things are easier said than done, and, anyway, what did he purpose? By all accounts the marriage was not fixed yet, so, meantime, Mr. Rattray thought he would go into town a bit and see what was doing there.

And "The New Redemption" rather took his fancy.

Earlier in the day, the girl called Lauder Graham had come in from her village to attend the lecture. She was now throned in a gallery, among the powers and principalities of Baldragon, with Miss Thomson on one side of her and tall John Thomson on the other, and if she wasn't happy she ought to have been, sitting up there, among friendly admiring folk, and wearing Mr. Thomson's ring of diamonds. It was her own choice, and for sheer success one doubts if anything could beat it. Some day she would sit as the provost's lady at all manner of civic performances; entertaining, or helping the town to entertain in the way Baldragon loves. The place is great

at this manner of thing and does it with verve. Some day, perhaps, it might be Sir John and Lady Thomson, and the flavour of the worked-for honour be as sweet in its way as any old title of county earl or baron. At any rate, Miss Lauder took rank among the best that Baldragon could offer, and it was no mean affair. The house was packed to the roof with all sorts and conditions of intelligence, and the famous traveller faced it with some difficulty, for, despite draughts, the atmosphere was as strong as the climate and the temper of the people.

In the Weavers' Hall, a dingy room at the top of a dark and more than fusty stair—such are the ways of Baldragon town—a limited number of weekly wage-earners sat listening to Mr. Beecham, journalist and barrister and political carpet-bagger, who appeared also as a masher, in irreproachable morning dress, with a shiny silk hat and tan gloves lying on the bare table in front of him, and otherwise presenting very much the aspect of those delightful dukes and earls who figure, long-legged and frock-coated, on the front pages of the domestic penny fiction papers. They never go out of date, these dear gentlemen; they are always there—or were, not long ago; and Mr. Beecham was there, in the Weavers' Hall, explaining how the redemption of the world was to achieve itself. It was to be a mixture of Tolstoi and Karl Marx, and would "arrive,"

apparently, when Mr. Beecham did: that is, when he became a cabinet minister. He didn't say so, of course, but the meeting understood as much. There seemed to be a natural connection. It is wonderful how much a Baldragon audience, of just this kind, can understand without being expressly told so. The intelligence, that evening, was not entirely in the Pitfour Hall, and the men present in the Cadger-gate did not take their visitor very seriously, but listened with a half-wistful, half-impatient kind of desire on their homely faces. They were not very big fellows, and they bore the look of being strenuously whistled to work three times a day, which must pall on men and women when it goes on for five and a half days a week, and, say, fifty weeks a year, and fifty years of life.

The Baldragon tenements also pall upon one, and don't take long to do it. Many of them are neither things of beauty nor joys for ever. It is quite to be expected that people who wander from one to another of them, especially the cheaper sort, in search of the ideal house which no factor ever has to let, should be glad to listen to a man who can promise a redemption. Nevertheless, though Baldragon has good reasons for wishing to improve upon itself, it has also reason to suspect that the best of schemes may only be the grinding of somebody's little axe; and so it happened that it had not come in its thousands, nor

indeed, in its scores, to hear the gentleman from London put the fly of rhetoric on the line of the political salmon-fisher.

"He may as well shut up," remarked Fleming Guthrie *sotto voce* to his companion. They were sitting quite in the background, and the laird of Dunragit was highly amused with the small and listless meeting. "They are just waiting for him to get through with it, and then D. H. will make a grand spread, and they'll wake up and thump the floor. It's D. H. they've come for."

"Who's D. H.?" asked Rattray.

"The chairman. Our own D. H., as I said before. If he had money, he'd be candidating himself. Glad I came round. It's plain they don't want that varnished stuff. At any rate, they don't want *him*!" Perhaps that was what it meant. Mr. Beecham painted the existing state of the world very black, and the audience seemed to concur. He painted the New Redemption a beautiful cerulean blue, and the people applauded mildly: it was a nice thing to hear of. The chairman was a young fellow, small and dark-haired and full of keen, conscious life. His dark eyes ran over the audience, his hair flew in crisp waves from his small-featured, positive face; he had all the air of being able to give a better address himself, and he was an interesting little figure. He rose with a spring as soon as Beecham sat down.

"What is the lad?" Rattray asked. He was giving deep attention to the proceedings.

"You've not heard about him? He's the chief of the labour party, here, for one thing. But he's the local genius, too. Writes popular fiction, full of crimes and awfully bad Scotch, and edits *The Toon*, a weekly paper. He'll be wanting to put your portrait into it.—Now then D. H.!"

The tone was something patronising and critical. Guthrie threw back his overcoat and surveyed the state of the room. But the meeting listened to its D. H. while he improved upon "our friend from the south," who had "come to breathe our caller air," and gave him to understand that he could have nothing to tell which Baldragon and Scotland generally did not know long before. The New Redemption figured but little in the chairman's remarks. He had something else in view that night. With Fleming Guthrie and another visitor, name unknown, in the meeting, he did not choose to give himself away at any point. So he told some pawky stories, the humour of which Mr. Beecham could not see, dressed as it was in fairly broad vernacular, and the people laughed and thumped and said—"That's it!"—"Ye're richt, man!"—and Mr. Rattray laughed and thumped with the rest. A hearty kick at churches and ministers followed, and the conclusion of the little speech, expressive of the young man's determination to live and write and fight for the

Cause of the People, carried the meeting on a wave. The man from Africa, though disapproving any attack on churches, was quite taken with the cleverness of the fellow. "I like that chap!" he said to Guthrie with an emphatic nod. "He's got smeddum in him."

The manufacturer rose to leave. "That's all right," he said. "I suppose we may go now. The fun is about over. Beecham doesn't seem to see where it comes in."

It was not quite over. A voice called out, "Now gie's a song, and syne we'll gae hame." There was something of this sort expected, and the people did not mean to miss it. Mr. Beecham stared. He felt very much out of his element. The flicker of careless amusement came back to Guthrie's face—he looked very unusual there, at the back of the homely little meeting—and from a corner at the chairman's left a girl came forward to sing. The people knew her; their feet made rough but hearty welcome, and there was instant silence. A queen's drawing-room, waiting to hear the greatest singer of the day "by command," could not have been more delicately attentive. Fleming Guthrie, standing at the other end of the narrow room, waited with the rest. He and the girl fronted each other over the benches and the heads —he with the ruddy colouring of the Northmen, toned and fined as by some skilful artist, she a maid from a Highland glen where the Pictish

blood still darkens the brooding eye and rests in the firm sweetness of straight lips, and leaves the slight cheek pale because it beats courageously at the heart. The dark hair shone like the finest floss silk, spun loose and a little ruffled by a breeze, but still silky ; the brows lay dark across a delicate arch of forehead, and the glance, half-eager, half-wistful, was full of a girl's thinking—a girl's, not a woman's ; yet any day might make her a woman. It was not that she was very young, though she was slim and light. Her age was evidently about twenty-three or four : something in her quiet manner told that ; it had neither the boldness nor the nervous expectancy of the budding lass. She stood straight and still, her eyes passing tranquilly over the room, her simple black gown framing her in a way most suitable to the subject, though certainly it threw out nothing, gave no adventitious effect. It made her look like a nursing sister : the same kind of fascination seemed to hang about her which some power—Destiny or Dress—breathes over most of those young women when they go forth.

A quick thrill shot through the young man who stood at the other end of the hall, among the empty benches. He forgot to speculate about her as he usually did about any woman who caught his attention ; he did not watch her in his ordinary way, did not think of noting her points, or of being taken up with her in any manner. Simply,

she was there, and it seemed to be a matter of great importance. He stood waiting. The sudden change in his face would have surprised any one who had been observing him. It was as if the artist at work on the portrait had dashed in a look of energy, of concentration, that he had not given before. The man had been a rover: now he might be a conqueror, capable of unexpected things—if that look lasted.

A voice began to sing. It was very simple; it slipped, pure and soft, through the gassy air of that upper room; it sang a Skye boat song which the men with the grey and homely faces loved, and as it stole into their ears their Scottish nature vibrated to it in silent chords of sentiment; then in a low undertone of bass, on which the girl's tender notes hovered like something spiritual. When it ceased, they applauded her, they applauded themselves, they demanded another, and she sang them something they had never heard before about 'ivory gates and golden' that seemed to throw a gleam on far-off gates lying in the sunrise with a sweet glow of hope on them—gates which might open even to common mortals some day. Can you tell why a voice like that moves you so? It wakens little hidden things that you did not know were sleeping in you; it throws a gleam here, a shadow there, and you are afraid to move, it is all so wonderful. Afterwards you cannot tell how it was done.

Fleming Guthrie turns over the wonder yet, and it remains. How did she bewitch him that night —a girl he had never seen before, and with such ordinary little songs? It was not like him, but it has been himself, the most real inward part of him, ever since, that's all!

"What's that?" said the laird. "Thanks to the lassie for singing? Why!—what name did they say?"

He stood up in a hurry. The applause and the moving out came together. The small crowd pushed by, with sharp glances at the two who waited for them to pass. "You don't mean to say that's her name?" repeated the laird. Young Guthrie paid no attention. The chairman and the speaker were in conference, the singer was getting into a jacket as well as she could. She did not expect any attention. "Allow me," said a voice in her ear, quick and low, as if it were a secret between them. Fleming Guthrie had crossed over the benches in three strides; the other gentleman came treading up the room with a sort of excitement about him. "Introduce me, if you please," he said, in a tone of authority. And still the young man who had been so attentive to him in the earlier part of the evening took no notice. The dark-eyed girl looked from one to the other with a little surprise, a soft thrill of she knew not what.

"Our name is Rattray," she said. "That is my brother. You don't know him?"

The editor of *The Toon* came over to the group. The wide-built elderly gentleman with the pale sallow face and small keen eyes regarded him.

"Where may you belong to?" he asked. "Are ye Baldragon folk, you two?" The young man did not understand why he should be catechised in this sudden manner, nor did he suppose the stranger to be a person of much consequence. Some American, he imagined, "doing" Scotland at a very unusual time of year, and for his part, he had Beecham to attend to—Beecham, whose opinion mattered a good deal.

"Well yes, we are, if you wish to know——" He stopped: the man's eye was keen.

"I do wish to know," answered the colonial-looking person, "for ye see it's my name, too, and I some think you're a nephew o' mine, young man."

It was an odd little moment. James Rattray drew quick breaths. He was more excited than was good for him. The young man whom he addressed answered:

"Are you Mr. Rattray of Ashludie?" No one could have told that D. H.'s heart was beating fast. He spoke as coolly as if he had been asking about the weather up the valley.

"I am. And you?" The man from Africa

searched him with small fixed eyes. They saw something, but not everything; they could not see the thoughts in the mind of a young man who had known of the laird's existence and meant that a moment something like this should come, but would have preferred it to come just a little differently. That is always the way with us and our moments. If they would arrive some other way than they do! But they are wilful: they arrive in their own way. The young man was aware of Mr. Beecham looking on and listening. In a manner, the whole world of Labour and Socialism was looking on: its representative in Baldragon must not be in a hurry to embrace a capitalist uncle.

"And you?" said this important relative.

"Oh, I am well known!" was the answer. "Anybody can tell you about me. I daresay Mr. Guthrie has given his account already."

A slight challenge passed from the little editor to the manufacturer, from the black head to the red one; there was a touch of old clan battle in the look, and Guthrie's light reserving smile flickered. D. H. was a smart hand, he said to himself.

"He tells me you're a genius," said Mr. Rattray bluntly. "And I've heard ye speak to-night; I can form my own opinion. But I want to know about your father. Where were ye brought up?"

"Here—in the Cadger-gate," was the prompt

reply. "Used to run about barefoot, selling papers." His look to Fleming Guthrie was like the throw of a spear. "I don't care who knows it."

"Ye don't need to care. Is your father living?"

"He died many years ago. I hardly remember him. He was on the railway. My mother did not live very long, either. Her folks helped us when we were little, and I got scholarships and started to write for *The People's Chapman*, and I'm doing pretty well: trying to help the world on a bit, as you see."

He paused a moment in this account of himself, which had all the effect of a public speech, the smallness of the audience being no matter.

"It's all right, Mr. Rattray," continued the young man. "You are my father's elder brother, I know. The paragraph in the papers when you bought Ashludie told us that much. It said where you belonged to."

"And you did not think of coming out to see me?"

"Oh yes; I was coming some time! I'd have interviewed you for *The Toon* and got your impressions of Scotland on coming back to it. But don't forget that you are in with the classes, and I belong to the masses; I'm in with them for all I'm worth," answered D. H. with spirit. He evidently believed himself to be worth something; he took himself seriously though he had humour enough for the world in general.

"I see," said the older man good-naturedly. It was "all right." A young fellow who had come out, hot foot, to claim relationship and insinuate heirship, would not have been to Mr. Rattray's taste at all. He looked from the brother to the sister, and rejoiced in his unexpected find. "And what does this young lady do?" he asked.

The girl's full dark eyes, turning softly on her brother, seemed to answer that her life was spent in loyalty, whatever that might require. Her lips parted a little, as if she were to answer for herself, but Donald did it, and she was content.

"Oh, she's with me in the office, and makes herself useful, and keeps house, and sings for the people, as she did to-night. And she's a real democrat, I can tell you."

"That's fine!" said their uncle heartily. Democracy was a sort of thing he could agree with. He had been reared on that whole-meal diet, and supposed he knew about it. The democracy of Wallace and Burns and the Ettrick Shepherd, and so forth—that was James Rattray's kind. He forgot certain remarks from the chair of the meeting and accepted his nephew as a democrat with a knack of talking big. Novelists and poets and popular leaders generally were allowed to talk big and spread themselves, and they didn't, as a rule, do much harm, Mr. Rattray thought. Anyhow, he was too delighted to be critical. He

had got some young folks of his own and they were worth finding.

"Did you have any idea of this, Mr. Guthrie?" he demanded. "This" was very wonderful and satisfactory. It would be a great interest to watch the lad going on with his work, to advise him and back him up, to have him and his sister often staying at Ashludie, and generally to go shares in the energetic improvement of Baldragon as carried on by Donald H. Rattray.

"Did you have any idea of this, Mr. Guthrie?"

The manufacturer, with his eyes on a pale refined face, framed in dark hair, answered, "Not in the least! I had no idea."

Who could have supposed that in the Weavers' Hall, among a few of the most ordinary factory folk, he was to find any one so interesting? Fleming Guthrie blessed his own good nature in coming round with the old fellow; he lingered till he learned that the young people were to be at Ashludie the next day and spend Sunday; he invited himself, unblushingly, to look up Donald, some time, and see if they wouldn't come out to his place at Dunragit. There might be curling soon, and, of course, D. H. was a curler. At last he took Mr. Beecham away to the hotel and supper, and it seemed to Ina Rattray that his way of shaking hands was particularly warm and friendly. But a young woman who had just come into possession of an important new relative had no

time to think about a new acquaintance, even one of such mark as Fleming Guthrie; and he certainly counted for something in Baldragon. She gave him a soft little answer—one of those which do a good deal more than turn away wrath—and was happy to think that he was going to take an interest in the Cause; and then she walked behind the other two men to the four-storey land on the Insch road where her brother elected to dwell, and thought all the way that they would have to receive their uncle in the kitchen because it was far too late to put on the parlour fire, and that she had nothing to offer him but some cocoa and a bit of cheese and Baldragon ginger-bread.

XVII

"ONE MUST LIVE, SOMEHOW!"

FIFTY stone steps, or more, had to be climbed to the top of the large new "land" where the brother and sister kept house. Mr. Rattray did it, but not with enjoyment. His face looked rather puffy and grey as he sat resting by the kitchen fire, which responded to a deft poke or two. While he got his breath again, his eyes went round the apartment, carefully noting how it differed from the tenement houses known to him in his youth. It was smarter, but not substantially different: just the kitchen room of young people who had their way to make and were following the good old plan of thrift. There was a range and a dresser, oilcloth on the floor, and dishes on a shelf, a small scullery opened off— "A great improvement, that!" pronounced Mr. Rattray.

The housekeeper's bed was there, in the usual recess, and everything, from steel to crockery and counterpane, was spotless. The laird thought of his mother's country cottage and the brothers

who played and disputed with him and went out of sight: or was it he who did that? Ashludie seemed a small thing to him as he sat in the warmth of the leaping fire and of old memories —those recollections of "home and infancy" which the Scot, more than many among the sons of men, cherishes. He could have given his lairdship over to the Cause, there and then, and gone back to Fife on two pound a week if a girl like this one with the soft dark eyes and singularly low voice would engage to keep a but and ben for him, and slip about, as she was doing just now. He talked to the nephew and thought himself immensely in luck to have made such a find, yet, in a subtle way of which he was unconscious, it was the niece who began to be the centre of new thought and feeling.

She, for her part, thought only of Donald and the Cause. Their uncle, the laird of Ashludie, had not been absent from her mind since Donald pointed out the newspaper paragraph, you may be sure; equally you may be sure—it will become plain as you come to know this quiet girl—that her imaginings were not for herself. Their uncle must take to Donald and the home-like stories in *The People's Chapman* and the local humours of *The Toon*; he must, certainly, take to the Labour Cause, and go in for that, heart and soul, or there was no use for him. Ina Rattray thought of the Labour Cause as Jeanne D'Arc did of France; and

Donald was her Dauphin. That is to say, being a Scots lass, she held him a new sort of Wallace or Burns, who would re-make his country and even, it might be, lead the world some day, for the Press and the Platform are greater than army corps, stronger than Maxim guns, and their dominion is world-wide. An imperial idea held Ina's brain and filled her life; no one could have suspected that she had anything so big, so exciting in her graceful, quiet-looking head. Donald talked and wrote and never guessed that a woman enthusiast did office chores for him and went home to make his food and his bed and wash the dish from which he had eaten. The woman enthusiast was Jeanne D'Arc and also a miraculously tidy Cinderella, the latter character being not only the outward and visible, to other people, but the actuality of which alone she was conscious. She "helped Donald," and Donald was going to be great.

James Rattray, watching the slim, soft figure as it moved about, was drawn to her. A pleasant sort of lass, this, and kept a neat house. She was like her father, who was aye a peacefu', dreamy loon and not for any stir. It was right for a woman to be like that. The lad, now, was made another way. He ought to come to something.

"The lad" appeared with bundles of journals—*The Chapman* and *The Toon*. There were a good many; they spread over the coal bunker and the

floor, and Mr. Rattray put on his glasses to consider them. Ina watched him, putting in a low word or two.

"Show your uncle that bonnie wee thing about 'The Buss aboon Traquair,'" she said; and again, "Have you got your last piece there, Donald? It's the best you ever did."

Donald scarcely needed this prompting. His things were, to him, events, not writings merely. A genius on the way to fame and fortune was hardly the description for him. He had fame—was known wherever Scotsmen read *The Chapman*, throughout the world—and, honestly, did not see what better there could be. A public benefactor was his notion of himself—a prose bard, who should move nations and create inquiry in the breasts of kings. So he had no false modesty. He showed this, and explained that, and James Rattray became immensely impressed. He scanned the sheets and looked up from them to the black-haired, small-featured incisiveness of the young journalist and marvelled at the good fortune that still attended himself. Health and success—and Ashludie—and now a nephew like this, picked up of a winter's night!

There was a dash about the "things," as Donald called them, that in any other line, business or the law, would have seemed to the laird no more than natural Scots grit, with a knack in it, but as "writing," with the finality of print given to

it, wore a preternatural air. Some other power than human nature—Rattray human nature—seemed to be in the pages.

"Aye, aye, you've something to be proud of, here, I can see! And I am proud, I may tell ye. I'm glad you're so well worth finding, my lad. You're not afraid to let out, and whiles you seem to be real pathetic, too. If ye'd gone to the ministry, now——"

He forgot all about that young man up at Whitehouses, whom he had urged to find more room for his feet.

"Oh, I'm better as I am. Wait till you see! I'm only beginning yet; only getting my hand in," answered Donald, gathering up *The Chapman*—that remarkable paper which is read all over the Scottish world, at home and beyond seas, and has been the cradle of not a few talents. Donald liked his cradle very well, and also, he meant to outgrow it altogether. That is the use of cradles, he would have said. You become much too big for them. "I never was afraid to let out," he remarked. "And as for pathos—yes, I can do that fine, and the folks like it."

He stacked his papers on the bunker, and ran his hand through his crisp, floating hair. To be an acknowledged genius and have an acknowledged place, at twenty-eight, and hardly know what it means to go suing to an editor—yes, Donald felt that he was pretty well off, in the meantime,

and now, having exhibited his testimonials—all self-made—he might give his attention to this new uncle, see what he was likely to amount to. He might be useful, one way or another.

Ina had set her table, and the cocoa was steaming. She stood waiting, a slender, silent figure, full of some unexpressed quality, which made no demand for attention.

"Will you please sit in?" she said to the laird, with shy deference and quiet house-wifeliness mingled. "We're in a plain way here, but when you come again I'll be better prepared."

The uncle gave her a kind look. Ina was in no way like his young lady of the Craig, but she made him feel very much at home. It would be fine to have a creature like this to step about and do things. He forgot her singing voice. It was echoing still in the ears of Fleming Guthrie, as he sat talking to Beecham, echoing with a soft sweet charm like a new thought of life; but to James Rattray she was just a good girl doing her duty where girls should do it, and neither the one man nor the other knew what Ina's quietness might grow to. The flower calyx was tender and modest; the blossom opened with a delicate fineness; the fruit had yet to form and ripen. Is there anything in the world more charged with potentiality than this life of early womanhood?—the slender figures that are to bear the burden of the race, the pure faces that look so

brightly to an unknown history which is not theirs only but the world's: the future being created as they form their own dream of it.

What Ina Rattray dreamed no one had yet asked. It was the Cause, of course, as you have heard; but she was one to cherish a thought deeply and see it in a light not of common day or common hopes.

"I like your plain way," said the laird. "It makes me wonder what I took up Ashludie for —all thae rooms and stairs! It seems a sort of foolishness now I think of it. I'm getting to be lonely in the place; near as lonely as I was when I used to sit in the steaming dark nights, over yonder, and plan my lairdship. It's queer—it's real queer!"

He stirred his cocoa and drank a little.

"Now tell 's all about yourselves, you two," he said. "I heard that my brother David had left bairns but when my old auntie died, that used to write to me, there was no one else, and I was never a great hand at correspondence, though I keepit my way and managed the brown folkies better than many a one did. Aye, aye!"

He was delivering his own credentials to his smart, successful young nephew; his were self-made entirely; he had never a bursary or anything to help him, nothing but grit and grind, and a piece or two of "luck."

Ina waited upon him with her dark attentive

eyes and gentle movements. He began to be *her* uncle, her only important "friend" as they say, after Donald; she felt as if she knew him. If he were good—and she thought he was—he should never be lonely again while she could help it.

The next day was Saturday. The four o'clock train from Baldragon took out Mr. Rattray, who was going home with a considerable store of the best provisions to get his house prepared for visitors; it also took out Lauder Graham, coming home with herself, no one in attendance. She and the laird met on the small station platform, where you must either be on good terms with your neighbours or very bad ones; so good that you can speak according to the mood of the moment, so bad that you can pass by on the other side and "glower." There is no room for mere indifference, such as people can practise in towns. Lauder tried to be occupied with her little parcels and with some remarks to the stationmaster, who, of course, attended to her as if she were going to leave him a fortune. James Rattray waited till she had done. He was determined to go along the road with her.

Lauder looked very distinguished and rather haughty in a dark brown costume with a hat to match—not a sailor—and a long brown fur added for the cold weather. The quiet grace of this raiment gave her the air of a young duchess.

"Miss Moray is giving the lassie good gear," thought the laird; "and she sets it well, the creature! She's spreading her wings on the loch o' the world, and no' caring though there are storms among the hills." His heart yearned over her.

"Your parcels had better go up with mine, Miss Graham. I've a heap of things here, and some friends coming home to-night, and the machine will be down. If there's anything ye need at once, I'll carry it for ye."

He got her to accept his company and hear the story of his "find" in Baldragon. Even a young lady very much on her dignity could not refuse to listen to so interesting a story, and the laird made it tell. He concealed the personality of his nephew at first and then sprung it upon her, and Lauder, to whom nothing which concerned the humanity of her neighbourhood was indifferent, was fairly drawn in. This wonderful and unexpected nephew was Donal' Howie, whose operations on local dignitaries were beginning to be talked of in town, and whose "Peat Gleams" in *The Chapman* she was rather fond of in a sneaking sort of way! Miss Moray liked them very much, and even Peter had been known to read them—as a sort of duty: he being an elder and bound to acquaint himself with things. Most people read Donal' Howie, that was the fact; unless, perhaps, ministers and other high pillars; only, it was considered the proper thing to sniff a

little and call it poor kind of stuff, though it "took."

As yet they did not speak of idylls so far north, nor had the term kail-yard come into use. But nowadays, Donald Howie Rattray figures—and quite justly—as a founder in that singularly effective school, being one of the first to play the tune of vernacular humour with pathetic variations. D. H. can do it so well! Lauder has often cried over him, and so has Susan Campbell. He could not fail to be an object of interest in the tale the laird told, although the hearer had distinctly meant to be high in her behaviour and keep the man from Africa at arm's length!

Donal' Howie—whom they had been discussing at Garth-Coire the day before! Now, why should he turn up as the nephew of James Rattray? A maiden coming home, restless and self-questioning (Lauder's case that afternoon, for all her calm show), might well feel as if there were something uncanny in being presented with so young and lively a neighbour.

"He's clever," she condescended to say. "I am sure you are to be congratulated. People talk about Donal' Howie."

"Will you and your aunt come and spend the evening wi 's?" said the laird, almost timidly, after accepting with decision her congratulations. "I'd like my niece to know ye."

Lauder had heard of the sister as "just a pretty

girl." She had no particular wish to know Miss Rattray, but could not deny herself the amusement of meeting the young journalist.

It was not so very lively at the Craig of a November evening, with auntie Bella full of a trousseau which nobody else took any interest in at all, but which might have been her own by the way she went on. There had been times lately when Lauder felt like handing it all over to her, and bidding her marry Mr. Thomson herself, and take him out of the way. Moments of this sort are like pains which cannot be spoken about. They have to be got through—forgotten—defied. Yes, she would bring auntie Bella to the Tower for the "high tea, as they call it," that Mr. Rattray promised. Anything for a diversion and to prevent a string of questions about John Thomson. That good man had desired to have their marriage day settled. A *marriage day*—for whom? Lauder Graham? No! No! NO!

It was a grey and still afternoon, the mist lying east, and the mist lying west, the straight country road marching silently across to the dim hillsides. Ashludie lay bare on its shelf, hardly visible, a little shrunk, as if it were growing old. Elsewhere, newer and more cheery places were ready, places where a girl was to find her kingdom if ever she had one.

Where did that "if" come from? What voice in the wide brown field or the russet upland spoke

it? Not the laird's. He was saying to himself what a New Year he would have in his mansion-house! Ashludie appeared anything but shrunk and small to him. He could not suppose that the young duchess beside him had almost come to wishing the grey Tower might crumble and pass away when—when that trousseau went to Baldragon.

They passed the wall which enclosed the Secession kirk and manse. Lauder looked straight before her, over the little bridge, over the quarrymen's cottages and the burn. She didn't like that wall. It had a curious forbidding sort of air: it might have been a convent wall. She liked free, bright-looking places, open to the sun and the sight of things.

James Rattray began to talk of the young minister and his mother; how faithfully the young man worked, what fine sermons he made, how sure it was that some church in Glasgow or Edinburgh would find him out some day. In Mr. Rattray's opinion he was fit for any promotion, and might even be a professor before all was done.

And as for Mrs. Renwick: well, the laird should have known that this woman, being one of the saints of the earth, was not exactly marked out to receive the good things of the world—position, money, comfort, the esteem of great persons in Church and State. Occasionally saints are crowned

in this way, more often they are crucified; and being saints, they take the latter as the greater compliment. Lauder did not know these things, nor, seemingly, did the laird. They agreed in recognising the claim of Mrs. Renwick to a thousand a year and in supposing that her son would probably have a call before long. Discussing these matters, they crossed the road and were in the avenue of Ashludie before Lauder bethought herself what she was doing. Then the laird began about Donal' Howie's "bits o' things" again, and it was not worth while to make a fuss. She gave herself leave to be inconsistent, to do things she had said she never would do. What does it matter? One must live, somehow, come of consistency what may.

A tide of young life rose in Lauder Graham. She went stepping up the road; James Rattray could not keep pace with her.

"Away ye go!" he said. "Put Miss Moray into her silken gown and bring her over at seven o'clock, and we'll have a fine evening, ye'll see."

The dusk had fallen. Lauder's firm, quick figure disappeared in it. The laird felt very happy.

"We'll no let the provost get her," he said to himself. "She maun take one o' the young anes—whichever o' them can win her. And, syne, Miss Moray 'll hae to be frank wi 's."

Lauder was going along the woodland terrace above the burn. Even in November it was charming. Her feet rustled through fallen leaves; the stream slid softly; it seemed all her own, just as it used to do, and she herself seemed to belong to herself. Of late it had not been clear that she did, and you know very little of our Lauder if you are not aware that to hold the fee-simple of life in her own right is, for her, the only way of living. The air of Ashludie must have planted, or at least nourished the instinct within her. The "leddies" of that ilk had always been "new women," and, like the Drummonds, ready for anything that gave life a taste. For Lauder, the flavour lay in a simple freedom.

XVIII

THE LAIRD'S FAMILY

"NOW this is just what I like," said the laird, looking round his tea-table. His glance had a certain wistfulness when it fell on Lauder, a certain something else as he caught Miss Moray's eye; but he got full satisfaction in his own niece opposite to him, at the tea-tray, the most gracefully quiet housekeeping figure. His nephew, also, made him very content. Crisp, dark, talkative, the young man engaged Miss Lauder quite like an old acquaintance with a cross-fire of satirical comments on Baldragon folk and Baldragon affairs, all save John Thomson, the new provost, who was granted to be "not the smartest, but one of the best men in the place." The first half of this description might scarcely be fitted to please, but it was true; Donald Rattray did not as a rule misrepresent things. And he may have intended that the phrase should stick in Lauder Graham's memory.

Other phrases stuck. He knew the inner working of the town machine and could tell of the

grinding of little axes by big little men who never "let on," but looked singularly innocent and unoccupied, like solid babies in a municipal perambulator. The perambulator had just been started for another term, and D. H. expounded the operation, and other operations bound up with it, in his best manner. He talked with one side of his tongue for his uncle, and the other side for the Craig ladies, taking very good care never to say too much. It might all have been printed in *The Toon*, in fact a good deal of it was at that moment being read in Baldragon as notes on "The Making of Baillies and other People." The unprinted version, issued to the Ashludie tea-table, had some leading-out, and was interspersed with remarks which Donald kindly allowed other persons to make at intervals. His sister was not one of these persons; she was studying Lauder, who seemed to her the most compelling creature, one whom all men must naturally follow after. What might she not do for a Cause that she believed in, for a man whom she really loved! But she would not be easily won. That seemed plain, already, to Ina.

Miss Moray was another who had little or nothing to say. Lauder had gone into the Craig and bombarded her with the news that the man from Africa had picked up a family of his own and it included Donal' Howie, no less, and Lauder intended to have tea with him. The second

announcement had no importance at all beside the first. Miss Moray was stunned. "A family! Donal' Howie!—he'll be the heir, then? What an upturning, sirs!"

To Lauder it seemed no such great upturning. Since the new man had picked up Ashludie he might as well have some people of his own in it with him, provided they were "decent." What it would be like to see Donal' Howie there as master, the girl did not yet ask herself. She pushed that aside. There were other things that one also, even more, wanted to push out of mind for a bit—the fixing of a wedding day, for instance. It happened to be extremely convenient to have a party to go to and some fresh acquaintances to meet. So in good time for the seven o'clock high tea, Lauder caused Miss Moray to get into a second-best silk gown and put on cloak and head wrap and go over to the mansion-house. But a very silent woman all the evening was the mistress of the Craig. She had become used to the laird. His family seemed to be a fresh "dunt" as heavy as himself, and not so easily got over.

He, for his part, thought Providence had been kind to him all round and far beyond what he deserved. Now there was no need to fear but that things would work out well. A man might sit still and watch them settle themselves.

So the laird did not say much, either. His

large face had a clearer, less watchful air than usual ; he sat wide-spread and comfortable, shoving plates of cake and honey and potted meat about the table, and calling on people to help themselves and be homely. For the rest, he left Miss Moray to " take it in " and D. H. to " show what he could do."

" I'm not to ask these folks of mine to stay with me altogether, ye ken," he explained to Miss Moray. " The lad's got his work to do, and he maunna waste time ; and missie, there, has got him and the Labour Cause on her conscience, and *she* maun be where *they* are. I think all the more of her, mum—and of Donald, too. And they'll be out often for Sundays and summer evenings, and keep 's stirred up. I'm maist extraordinary happy to-night, Miss Moray, if ye'll allow me to say so."

Only Miss Moray heard the last sentence, and her short glance, under knit, sandy brows, did not encourage any further confidence. She had the look of one who was thinking very hard about something and did not wish to be disturbed.

At the other side of the table D. H. had come to Baillie Cleek, who, as it happened, was a favourite with Miss Graham. " The veriest old axe-grinder in the north of Scotland, and does it as though it were a Christian duty ! " said Donald. " See him moving in committee to appoint one of his cousins or brothers-in-law to a nice fat

post, you'd think he was standing at the plate receiving the widow's mite!"

"I like Baillie Cleek," said Lauder, with her clear bluffness of face and look. "I've met him several times. He's a nice old gentleman."

"The nicest old family provider that ever plucked the public fowl and looked as though he couldn't help it," returned young Rattray. "He has no ambition for the provostship, you understand? That means, there is still another friend needing a berth."

"Baillie Cleek is very kind and gentlemanly," said Lauder, in just the same way as before—as cool and unconcerned as Donald was incisive. Ina marvelled at the mind a girl must have who could answer Donald like that and not care. His lips tightened and he gave a quick little glance out of an eye-corner. He suspected more reason than there really was for the young lady's opinion. She just liked the simple-faced old intriguer: that was the whole thing! Lauder did love a deferential manner and to feel herself on a bit of a pedestal—and yet, not bored. She might wish to laugh a little at the worshippers; such was her right; but they must on no account be generally regarded as ridiculous. Now, in Baldragon, she had rather enthused over "that nice old Baillie Cleek," and D. H.'s remarks were disconcerting. However, he was nothing if not quick in the uptake.

"Well, anyway, we have an excellent provost

just now, and I hope we shall keep him for a second term. I mean to write him up for all I'm worth."

A sudden gleam struck from Lauder's hand as the laird moved a lamp. It caught her own eye and Donald's and Ina's. The ring was a lovely half-hoop of diamonds. They seemed to flash every ray of colour in that moment, separately, yet all together in one quick scintillation. Lauder sat dazzled, in a dream. Where did the ring come from, and what did it mean? She looked up. This was the house of Ashludie, but who were the people in it? For the space of a minute she had the strangest feeling of being a ghost in an old home with a thread twined about her which drew elsewhere and would not snap. Then she caught her breath and dashed off into a stream of talk about Crieff, about Leipsic and schooldays there, about anything and everything, all in that fresh "outspokenness" which never rose above a soft chanting and treated Donald as if he were a lively schoolboy, permitted to be on terms of homage.

Donald did not quite enjoy it; the laird grinned; Ina, the sister, sat marvelling, too surprised to be indignant, too much in love herself with this Lauder of the many lovers to resent anything, even the little quips thrown at *The Toon* and its editor. For Ina, as for nearly every one else, Lauder was Lauder, a princess in her own right.

One of the exceptions came in—Fleming

Guthrie—to make a neighbourly call on Mr. Rattray, of a Saturday evening; and the new crystal changed the compound. They went to the drawing-room, and there was music, and arrangements were made for Ina to go and "see" this, and "hear" that. Fleming Guthrie could talk, like any other man, more than many men, and on many subjects. He could rattle, and he could be plaintive and mild; he made himself and Ina the centre of the room, D. H. being a mere youth in attendance, and Lauder a sort of lady-in-waiting. They two could entertain each other with the pictures and relics and the story of Ashludie; Fleming Guthrie had no bonds to Lauder Graham, and certainly none to Donal' Howie. But he had come for a purpose, and it fired him with a singular brilliance, before which every one else seemed pale and quiet.

And Ina Rattray listened, sang once or twice, listened again, sat in a dream, dark-eyed, and shy and sweet, too modest even to think of asking herself why he talked to her. That he was interested in Donald's work was Ina's one idea. Her woman's judgment was wrapped in deep folds of unselfishness which hid from her the things concerning herself. This is perhaps the reason why some of the best women in the world make the great blunders of life and never know what they have done.

It was a curious little party. Lauder found

herself deposed—even in the house of Ashludie, and took it quite placidly, for Guthrie Fleming did not amuse her as he amused most people, and Ina Rattray was a dear, whom it would do Guthrie all the good in the world to fall in love with. Lauder threw a glance occasionally and hoped he would go deep; he appeared to be doing so. That he would impress Ina did not occur to her as in the least degree likely. He was too light metal for the sweet girl Socialist with the dream in her eyes.

"Would you advise me to go into Parliament if I see a chance?" Donald was saying. He wanted to see how the idea would strike. It seemed to strike Miss Graham as interesting, and they discussed it. Lauder was curious to know if he would stand as a Labour candidate, and he managed not to tell her, but to leave it as an impression. He could see that her idea of him was distinctly toned up by the suggestion of M.P. coming after his name.

At the other side of the room, in the neighbourhood of the piano, music was the ostensible topic. "You should cultivate your voice—indeed you should!" some one was saying. "Although nothing could make it more charming, to be sure!" They were well in shadow, beyond lamps, and no one but himself saw the faint rose-pink rise on the pale oval cheek. He leaned a little nearer. "But all fine gifts ought to be cultivated. And your

voice is thrilling. I hope you don't know what a power it gives you."

Ina could not turn off anything; she had no small change of facile rebuke or raillery or mock acceptance; she could only be distressed because he was too kind and said too much. But he was quite easily persuaded to turn again, himself, to the piano, and so leave her at ease. And she thought his touch, his own voice, masterly. They were, in truth, very effective, as Fleming Guthrie knew.

The elders, meanwhile, at the fireside, played draughts; Miss Moray making Carter comments inside her own face on what she saw across the room, and the man from Africa feeling happier than words could tell as he viewed his family.

XIX

JUDGMENT

A WEEK after this, between ten and eleven one night, a quick foot might have been heard on the road which skirts the base of the hills between Kilpirn and Dunragit. Some one covered the interval with a pace that meant business. It was the walk of a man who had an object before him ; who would go past something, leave it behind, achieve a better. He had driven along the road a few hours earlier full of a new expectation. As he returned, the idea was more than fulfilled. It had become a keener and more absorbing thing. He had come out as a master in life, a connoisseur, to catch a pleasure that offered not far away. He returned, still a master, of course,—he could never fancy himself anything else,—but with a purpose which had laid hold of him and would compel a certain amount of service ; a purpose that walked every step of the road with him and fixed a point ahead that must be reached.

Hitherto, he had carried the fee-simple of life in his

hand. For many men, as for most women, nothing of the sort is possible. They give hostages to fortune and the ransom money spins out indefinitely. This traveller, however, had been a free-lance, had moved light of foot and heart on the roads of the world, giving no hostages, or, at any rate, none whom he thought counted. And now as he strode through the quiet night he declared to himself that he was free to seize a new chance which attracted him. What is past is past. Say that some of it was not good; but if one means to be thoroughly good now, it will more than make up. Let bygones be bygones: they are so small, the whole lot of them! Fresh possibilities lie in front—beautiful possibilities, close in front. Naturally, one fixes one's attention on them. So he sped along. His blood was up—the Norse blood of men who had a world to themselves and could fling about in style. He loved to feel it tingle in him, to feel himself alive in a new place and be drawn on irresistibly. Unless it was irresistible it was no use to Fleming Guthrie. He was either compelled or he sauntered and drifted. Somewhere behind him, long ago, there was a man whose blue eye flashed as he got ready to sail the seas and pounce upon a new shore. "I'd like fine to have been him!" said the man of Baldragon as he walked. Doubtless "him" did many a fierce and cruel thing on the shore where he landed, but his successor did not think of that.

"We get very little fun for our money here," he said to himself and the road. "When I'm married, I'll buy a yacht and go round the world —when I'm married."

He had never before entertained the idea of "marriage"—not he! It was much too commonplace an ending, unless one happened to meet a foreign princess whose affairs needed administering. But even that would be a bore. No; marriage was the refuge of the destitute; a provincial sort of thing, below the level of a free spirit. So it had seemed, hitherto. Now, Guthrie's eye searched the night as though for the dawn of his wedding day; he carried himself with a spring as he went speeding from one glen to another, by the farm-steadings and the empty stackyards and the dark patches of plantation.

"She's the quietest, gentlest creature in the world," he said to himself again; "and I was never taken by that sort before. It's odd!—really it is! What in the world makes me want *her*?"

It amused him. He was leaving his past very much behind when it came to this.

"But I *do* want her!—must have her! It's real, downright, no-mistake-about-it. I'm going to be a good boy at last!—and all for a slim lass in a black frock like a nun's!"

A by-road came down to the highway, dribbling past a farm-steading that lay in the skirt of the hill. It was "the Mains of Dunragit," or, as they

say in England, the home farm. A big hayrick stood in the corner, and from the other side of the valley road a bit of woodland threw a shadow to help the darkening of the earth. A little beyond this corner the approach to Dunragit House went off, winding away to where the mansion was set, square and white-faced and not particularly pretty, right up against a mass of crag. It was always said to be "particularly commodious inside," and to have "fine gardens"; there was little else that could be said about it. But it was "county" all the same, in a quiet way, and so far Fleming Guthrie got what he wanted out of it. Perhaps he would be wanting more shortly.

He came on, swinging a stick and whistling softly to his red beard. Sky and earth, hill and strath, all slumbered and slept. His own energy seemed to be the only life there was. As he reached the farm road he slackened his pace a little. A bit of verse had been shaping in his brain; he wanted to finish it before going in. For the matter of that, he could walk all night and make more verses as he went.

Bonnie lassie, dark-eyed lassie,
Lilting through the glen;
Modest, true, and tender are ye,
Wil'ing hearts o' men.

Bonnie lassie, sweet-voiced lassie,
Love hath brought ye near;
And my heart runs out to meet ye,
Bounding like a deer.

Bonnie lassie, winsome lassie,
Love shall make thee mine
And my heart shall rest beside thee,
Quiet, too, like thine.

Rather inconsistent with buying a yacht and going round the world; but a man in love will say anything, and Scottish minor verse has a trick of its own into which every poet falls as a matter of course. Guthrie laughed a little at his own sentiment and the idea of settling down as a peaceful domestic character; enjoyed it hugely, as a proof of the good boy in him which was going to prevail, and meant it—quite meant it. He fitted his verses to a tune, and resolved to make a livelier one to finish with—something about

Bonnie lassie, wistfu' lassie,
There's a world to see;
Take my hand, my tender beauty
Love as I love thee.

Yes, that worked it up a bit, made it more actual. Why, she hadn't seen anything, the darling,—her eyes were full of a dream!

"Aye, there ye go, whustling, whustling! But the day o' sin's ahint ye, and the day o' judgment afore, and whustling 'll no serve your turn when the rocks are falling all aboot!"

It was a woman's voice, quiet and stern, and it came out of the darkness between the plantation and the hayrick. He stopped dead short on the road, his stick half in the air, his eyes bent on

the spot where a dim figure of a country "wife," muffled in plaid and darkness, hovered, a shadow among shadows. Had he in a manner perceived it waiting there and known that it bore some message for him? The voice went on:

"I've been half the night waiting for ye, Fleming Guthrie, and here ye are, the same as ever ye were."

That was not what he had supposed about himself a minute before; not at all! She went on:

"Smart with the tongue and light o' the foot; as clever as ye can be, and no' to be trusted a hand's length—that's you, my fine gentleman!" A dry twig fell in the plantation, or perhaps a mouse crept; the night crackled, as though it, too, could say something.

"Well, has that relieved your mind? You seem rather excited to-night. I am sorry I am not a better fellow."

"You sorry for anything ye've done? Not unless it hinders ye in a fresh scheme! Your own lightness never gave ye a moment's uneasiness, Fleming Guthrie."

"I don't quite agree with you; and I should know best. Besides, if I am made that way—and there's some truth in what you say, I'm afraid—it can't be helped. Now what are you down here for at this hour?"

Something struck him on the breast as he pulled up the collar of his furred overcoat and

adjusted himself. He had made up his mind to part company with his past, and he would! The family of a shepherd on his own estate should not stand in his way.

A small hard packet struck him and fell to the ground. "I'm here to return that to ye, my man, and a curse with it—a curse!—a curse!"

Her words came with difficulty. She tried to hurl them upon him in successive blows. A listener would have known that she belonged to Scotland's nobler peasantry, and that every nerve, physical and spiritual, was in fierce revolt.

"You were to be sae careful of the good old shepherd, and he was to want for nothing, and to keep his mind easy. You came to see him and let him speak to ye of the years he'd wrought on the land and the years he'd been an elder in the kirk down-by, and all the time ye meant that we should pay ye wi' our vera heart's blood and the shame of wer souls! Ye wolf!"

"What—what do you mean? What are you talking about, my good woman?" stammered Guthrie.

The woman came from the hedge and stood close beside him. Her face, pallid, homely and small-looking, gleamed out of her plaid. It was as if one of the Furies had stepped out of the black hills to claim a man for judgment.

"And ye don't know what I'm talking of, Fleming Guthrie? Well, I'm speaking of wer

daughter, the shepherd's and mine. Ye ken I'm his second wife, and he has only the one son with him of his first family, and I just hae the one daughter. She's but a slip of a creature, Fleming Guthrie, hardly a woman grown, and we've treasured her and kept her, as we thought, frae harm."

Constrained and quiet, with a blow as it were in every clause, the voice went on and the face seemed to bear in upon Guthrie so that he shrank away.

"I'm telling ye, Fleming Guthrie, laird o' Dunragit, about wer daughter, the shepherd's and mine; our ae lass, and the pleasure of our hoose —till last night."

"Last night!" repeated the man. He was trying to remember something which had already vanished from his brain. It came back as he spoke and as the pale judge in the plaid answered:

"I'm telling ye. Last night there was a gentleman, as they say, on the hill near the shepherd's cottage, and he was seen speaking with our bit girlie, and she came in and went to her bed in the ben-end—she had aye the best we could gie her—and this morning the creature was fair blind with crying and as white as a pulled lily. And that's just what she is, and you're the cause! Oh, my bairn, my bairn!"

She threw her face up to the infinite night, and her cry went through it. Guthrie shivered. His foot struck on the packet which had been thrown at him.

"There's the money you left with her—five pound notes, and a stone inside them, like the heart of ye—ye wolf! Take it up, and put it in your pocket, and keep it there to mind ye what ye are, Fleming Guthrie! And now my tale is told!"

She stepped back.

"Take up the money," she repeated sternly, "and keep it, as I bid you. That's the least ye can do. I'd put a mark on your brow if I could, that folk might know ye!"

She stood in front of him till he stooped for the small parcel and slipped it into an outer pocket; then the way was left for him to go forward.

"I'm very sorry about all this, you know," he said. "You might let me do what I can to—to help—— Well, call it anything you like; say, to atone. I allow that I've been a rascal; but I have a great respect for you and your husband."

"You might weel respeck him, if ye were capable o't, and him a God-fearing, holy-living man, as ever steppit after sheep on the bare hills o' this world. But you respect nothing, and never will. Ye canna do it! You and your fine castle up-by, and your careless grandeur!"

She seemed to strike him again with a fierce hand. He shrank a little as if the blow had lit on his shoulder. Something spiritual shot forth from the peasant woman, not her own wrath

or grief only, but the wrath and grief that lie about us in the dim night of the world, and quiver at moments, like far faint stars, and fade again. If there be a day coming, after this night, and the stars blaze forth as great suns to scorch or quicken, a man had need to be sure of himself and his past—the past that will *not* be left behind!

Fleming Guthrie felt for the lump in his pocket. He was going to force it upon the woman. She rolled herself in her plaid and stood fronting him. A pair of small, tired eyes in a weather-worn face searched for a man in the gloom—if, perchance, one might be there—and found only a voice, plausible, regretful, entreating, ready to promise anything easy and futile, a voice that believed in itself and was sure it meant well.

"I see," said the woman. "And it's no more than I expeckit. There's one thing ye could do, and be an honest man, and ye winna do it."

"I never promised," he said hastily.

Then her passion got the better of her. She threw back her shawl and struck him with open hand upon the face. "Ye did! Ye maun have promised, before my bit lassie trusted ye! But go your ways, Fleming Guthrie!"

She lifted her plaid and turned to the farm road, not looking again at him.

"Gang your ways, Fleming Guthrie. I'll no' call at your castle to-night, nor any other time,

to bother ye. Maybe God will take up the case some day and see it through."

His rapid steps went out of hearing; hers, slow and heartless, toiled up a hill road against a cold wind. "My bairn! My bairn!" broke from her at intervals. Life had been true and sweet in the shepherd's cottage on the side of Dunwhinan, but the rich man had stolen the poor man's one ewe lamb and would go scot free.

XX

"IN APRIL? SO SOON!"

A PACKMAN came through the glen in the afternoon, with a flat tin box on his shoulder and a black-covered bundle swinging from one hand. He had just started out in this line of life and meant to succeed. The quarry folk and farm servants would call him the tallyman, he knew, and he would not be popular with husbands. It couldn't be helped. Properly speaking, he was "the travelling draper," and reasonably honest at that. Hard-working and honest; he gave himself this character as he came along, and saw no reason why even a tallyman should not be a boon and a blessing. Folk could not always be going into town for things, and his pack was a sort of condensed extract of the needs of womankind. Even the ladies at the big houses might be glad to encourage him to the extent of flannel and wincey for charitable purposes, or linens for furnishings; and the smart maid-servants were his natural prey. He didn't want to be hard on any of them, but he intended to do a trade, and have a district of

his own some day, and get on to be, not a travelling draper, but a man who employed others to travel for him while he sat at the receipt of custom. It was a fair enough ambition as things go, and it made the tin box light to carry—which is perhaps the main use of our ambitions, any of them. They make the tin boxes and black bundles of present duty or necessity light to us, and we get over the long country road. Ahead—always ahead—is the town where we are to succeed.

The road did not seem long to this traveller. He had been on many, and they always came to an end sometime, with some result or other, it didn't much matter what; if one line failed, you went on to a second or third, that was all. This time he had struck one that would answer, he hoped. It was at any rate an out-door job. He thought with horror of fellows who sat in offices, driving thirsty pens. A tall lean lad, with hard bones, and a soft, open, odd sort of face, he whistled his way down the glen, and about four of the afternoon went round to the back door of the Craig.

There were various things going on in the world. Fleming Guthrie was coming from Dunragit and trying to leave his past behind him that he might win sweet Ina Rattray. He supposed, indeed, that he had effectually parted from it, and need fear no more encounters at shadowy corners. He was going forward to a new life.

In the Secession manse a mother and son had prepared, with many flutters, for a "party" which could hardly fail to disappoint them both, and yet was a great event, and *might—might*——

Upstairs in the Craig two maidens sat together, as maids love to do, in a room sacred to one or both of them, and so a fit place for confidences. They had been considering clothes, and now one of them was reading a letter which had come in the morning and, being lengthy, had not yet received proper attention.

Hugh Renwick, in the study of the Secession manse, was making a lecture for next Sunday morning, while his mother sat waiting for the laird's carriage. It was not far to the Craig, where, behind one of the storm windows that looked towards Ashludie, Lauder Graham read a letter from John Thomson, a good man and a true, who had plenty of money and of friends, a town villa full of pictures, a shooting estate and a model factory, but who had never known what it was to be loved as Lauder Graham could love if she once began. *If—if—if*—always that wee obstinate word which seemed the biggest in the whole dictionary when it came like this.

Ina Rattray, sitting on the side of the bed, was putting touches of re-trimming to a blouse. She had a gift for needlework; Lauder had none; and her admiration for the young lady

who was to become Mistress Thomson and bear rule in Baldragon, knew no bounds. If the name Lauder spelt love to any one it was to the dark-eyed, gentle Ina. She would have come and sewed at the trousseau willingly, if there had been need; she was taking great pleasure in sorting this blouse which the Insch dressmaker had spoiled. Lauder was to wear it in the evening and look charming in it, and move through those dear old rooms of Ashludie like a princess. Ina glanced over to her from the bed and re-settled the trimming with the hand of a born artist. "That's the way of it," she said softly. "It's bonnie stuff when it's arranged right."

Lauder lifted her face from her letter. She saw neither the blouse nor Ina. A strange look was in her eyes, her fine little mouth was set. Ina let her work fall. Lauder shouldn't look like that! She ought always to be clear and fresh and bright, a piece of high-bred simplicity. Her troubles ought to be such as she could speak of and cry over honestly, and get up and go away from. But she was going to speak now, it seemed. The other girl waited.

"He writes a real kind letter, John Thomson," said Lauder, in the queerest voice, as if she were talking in her sleep. "He prays that he and his dear lassie may be the means of doing a great deal of good in Baldragon—and he wants the marriage to be in April."

In April! It seemed to be a word out of some ugly foreign language when she saw it there in Mr. Thomson's neat, precise writing. "*In April*—what does that mean? How far off is it?" said the queer, sleep-walking voice again. It made the other girl feel strange. Not very far off, indeed—not very far, if you were afraid of anything that was to happen then! But Lauder Graham never, never seemed to know what fear meant.

"It's for you to name the time, surely!" was the answer that reached Lauder's ear presently.

"Yes—it's for me to do that, and he says so. But he wants to be at Rome for Easter." It was very dreamily spoken.

"And don't you? It's the big thing, that. I wish some one would offer to take me! Rome at Easter—and the music! Oh, Lauder!"

She looked up for a moment and then down again to her work; the face of the bride-elect did not express any rapture.

"I am a fool. I said one day that I longed to see Rome. What was I thinking about? Leipsic is the place. I wish I was at school again, and could go to the gardens with the girls and have coffee and hear the band play 'The Soldiers' Chorus!' That would be music enough for me. Dear old Leipsic, how happy I was there!"

The Highland blood in Ina shivered. This was uncanny.

"You might come back that way," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "and hear as many German bands as you like, if you prefer them to the Passion music in St. Peter's. I shouldn't, if it was me."

Lauder paid no attention. She dreamed on, in the sleep-walking voice.

"I'm not for Rome. I'd be going round among the ruins thinking of Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon, and how 'no one would ever know what she thought of a wedding journey to Rome.' I should know, by that time, and I'm afraid my thoughts would come out before all was done. I'm not good at keeping them to myself."

She certainly was not. Ina put stitches into the blouse and made no answer. She began to tremble. Among the beautiful things of the glen there came something not beautiful at all. It didn't match with the silk and lace in her hands, nor with her thoughts of Lauder. It matched with nothing in her experience. She remembered something Mrs. Campbell had said only that afternoon. Was it coming true already?

Lauder suddenly crumpled her letter into a ball and threw it on the floor.

"Why is it always the old men who have the money and want to marry me? And why are they in such a hurry? They won't wait! 'The marriage in April.' It's too soon!—it's too soon!"

She sprang to the window and leaned her arms on the high sill and looked down the glen to

the leafless trees and the turret rising over them, blue-grey in a white-grey coldness.

"*In April.* Though I said the very last day, it isn't five months. And then—it will be a wedding journey to Rome. I don't see how I can go that jaunt."

She gazed over the den. If you must marry an old man, why not the one who has your dear Ashludie? Lauder turned suddenly from the window and threw herself beside Ina on the bed and drew her close. They were both shivering. Love is warm, but Prudence is a chilly carle.

"Ina, I *can't* want my liberty! I can't!" The bonnie face was all drawn and wrinkled, the grey eyes full of terror as she looked from Ina's shoulder into a future which held no charm.

"Then keep it, Lauder dear; keep it. You'll never have it again," said a low voice with the *lilth* of a Highland stream in it.

"Never again, all my life. He's a good man and a kind, and oh so careful! He'll not let me stir without him."

"And you'll not can bear it," answered the low voice again. "I know!"

"And then I'll be here with auntie Bella, and she'll never let me forget how much money she put out on me for nothing, and what I might have come to yonder; and her and me'll just come to be two old maids, each with her 'way' and her cat. I'll not can bear *that*!"

Was it of *that* she thought most as she looked on to the years and saw Mr. Thomson married to some one else, and winning a title from the Queen, while other folks also got wives—folk in manses and elsewhere—and Lauder Graham was left to her own freedom? She sprang up and stepped the floor; a fine colour rose on her sweet, strongly moulded cheeks, the Lauder light came into her eyes, the sharp square wrinkles went away and left her brow clear like a child's. Ina looked and wondered. Back and forward went the quick step. "There's no freedom here, you see," said a voice with another ring in it.

"I think you've a good deal," answered Ina soberly.

"Just now. It's fine just now. It's as it used to be when Sir Alec was here. I went to Leipsic, then; and I was going again. But he's dead, and I've to make my own way. Don't you imagine that Lauder Graham is getting all the pretty things and doing as she pleases! It's the provost's wife."

"And the provost will be terribly disappointed if he does not get his wife, I am sure," said the other girl. She felt extremely sorry for Mr. Thomson, or for anybody who thought to get Lauder for a companion, and then should lose her.

"Poor man! Oh, it would be too bad—it would indeed! He is so awfully kind, Ina; and he *trusts* me. That's where it is!"

"Well, then—hadn't you better let it be in April?" said a soft, firm voice. It made Lauder think of the morning when John Thomson's first letter came, and she sat looking at a picture in the dining-room. One of the faces in it was very like Ina's. Suppose one were a queen going to be executed, and suppose one tried to put it off, would a sweet, remorseless lady-in-waiting say, in just that voice of Ina's, "Hadn't you better let it be done?"—like having a tooth out?

"Why?" said Lauder suddenly. The word came very quick. "Why? This is not the last year of the world, and I'm young yet; there's plenty of time."

"But he's not young. He hasn't much time," said the soft, unyielding voice. Lauder's colour changed; she lifted her head as if to a breeze.

"Oh, well, he has waited three years for me already and one more won't hurt him. In fact, it should run to seven by rights. Seven!—that would give me four more. The trousseau will keep quite well; and I could go and stop with Miss Thomson for weeks at a time. It seems a shame to turn her out, poor body!"

She looked a little dangerous. Liberty was in the air and being scented, as a young doe scents the upper regions of the hill, and the forest sanctuary. Ina looked, and loved, but could not comprehend at all.

It meant nothing, of course, yet it sounded

strange, for Lauder must like Mr. Thomson better than any one else, or she would not be engaged to him. And being engaged—of course with fear and trembling, but still because she chose and desired it—there was nothing to do but go on and "get it over," and be one of the happiest women in the world ever after. Such was Ina's simple and perhaps very old-fashioned gospel. For her, an engagement was a sacred thing, to be kept as one keeps marriage itself, unless for reasons the most overwhelming. Nor did it occur to her that Lauder felt any other way. So all would come right, no doubt. It was only that she was Lauder: adorably frank, and free, and breezy, and must have her little flings about "seven years" and a trousseau. It seemed, perhaps, that she might do anything if she took the notion; and yet no!—for she was true.

Ina gave her the blouse and a warm, shy, lingering kiss on the forehead, and left her to her dressing.

XXI

CALLING THE GHOSTS

DOWNSTAIRS the packman was laying out his goods and himself on the kitchen floor for the benefit of the young servant-maid, who had weakly allowed that she was thinking of making some "claes" to herself. He had calico and flannel, and patterns of dress stuff, aprons, too, and caps, kerchiefs, and laces. You might forestall a year's wages pretty soon with the tallyman, as many a household knew, to its cost. The lassie of the Craig was fairly dazzled with the new pedlar's wares and his fluent tongue. He was a boiled Scot, he said, and had been set a-simmering in foreign parts. Simmer he did, in recommendation of this and that.

"Now, Jeannie, that's your name, I expect; ye look like a Jeannie, ye ken—I'm going to advise ye against a wincey petticoat. Ye'll knit yoursel' a petticoat, lassie. What you're needing is a smart dress-piece for the summer. I'll bring ye patterns next time I come, and meantime ye'll be busy with your knitting. Here's the yarn. And ye should hae a length o' calico and be

laying up plenishing, Jeannie. You've got a young man, of coorse, and a lass like you should be weel stockit before she takes up housekeeping."

Jeannie was flustered to the very height of foolish dreaming. She began to imagine that the loon at the farm, with whom she niffered country compliments of a morning over the milk-cans and by the roadside of an evening, might be counted solidly for a "young man." It was glorious to think of, and of course the tallyman was right; a likely lass ought to be laying up plenishing even at sixteen and a wage of four pound ten in the half-year. The money looked expansive just then in the middle of the kitchen, and Jeannie, somehow, felt as good as engaged—to some one else than Miss Moray.

"What haver's this?" said a voice in the doorway, and Miss Moray appeared, dressed for going down to the Tower to spend the evening, and a very careful toilet she always made for that purpose. Nevertheless it was a common remark about the countryside that the lady of the Craig was "no' quite hersel' yet." There seemed to be "aye somethin' on her mind."

Her ears missed very little of what went on at the back of the cottage; even the dreams in Jeannie's head were not quite beyond her power of guessing. "You to be speaking of plenishing," she said, coming in, buxom and resolute, in black satin merv, with plenty of lace and gold watch-

chain about the bosom, and sandy hair drawn back authoritatively from a Carter face. Jeannie shrank, and dropped the cap she was holding; such a smart little goffered cap! Miss Moray was real awful, she said to herself. The draper did not take that view, and in five minutes he had the mistress fully occupied. Miss Moray liked fine to get a bargain, especially in wincey or flannel for a poor neighbour, and she proceeded to price everything in the pack. Jeannie recovered herself during this process, and began to put in her word. It was, "Eh, Miss Moray, but thae aprons are bonnie!" and "Miss Moray, ye were saying ye needed hankies," while the draper talked and the mistress examined the goods with critical eyes. They were all enjoying themselves and did not notice that Lauder had arrived on the scene. She, too, came downstairs, ready for their little gathering, and if the truth were known, in a mood for almost anything.

Miss Moray was all on business bent, measuring a piece of flannel with her hands and casting glances at some "hankies" as if they were sheep. She was not going to pay one halfpenny more than was necessary for a petticoat to old Annie Wilson, not she! Her colour rose; she let Jeannie dream over caps and aprons. Lauder stood in the dusk of the passage, waiting sarcastically. The packman knelt among his goods and folded them over and over.

"I should never have been in this trade, that's

a fact. I'm too good to the public and not good enough to my master or myself. My commission will be nothing at all. Now these red hankies—there's a fortune in that sort of thing on the West Coast. Every nigger wants them. It's easy doing trade there; I should never have left it."

"What coast?" said Jeannie curiously. She saw Miss Lauder in the doorway, wearing a dress of creamy white cashmere, with creamy lace about the body. It was just a lovely frock, and she looked like a young queen, and Jeannie wondered if there wouldn't be some young man at the laird's dinner-party who would think so. This consideration and an awestruck sense of Miss Lauder's conquests, did not prevent her, however, from listening to the packman's answer.

"West Coast, miss—crocodiles—fevers—bully trade—no sort o' pleasure in life. I'm a Baldragon man, and I prefer to go round my own country and deal with the ladies." He also was looking at Lauder, straight.

"My! You've been there, too!" said Jeannie. "How do all you folks from Africa come here? Maybe ye ken the new laird?"

"I do that! I was in the next factory to his," answered the lad. Miss Moray seemed to wake up all at once from her consideration of bargains; she looked at the clock.

"You drapers would gar folk waste all their time and their means," she said, with the sharp-

ness which had been heard in her voice lately. "Jeannie, you lassies are just made of covetousness and wastry, every one of ye. Take your stocking, when we're gone, or ye can have a look at the paper, and syne go to your bed. I'll have the front door key. And now, my man, you can pack everything except this flannel, and take the road. And ye needna call back. I'm not in the way of dealing with your sort as a usual thing."

Poor Jeannie! There was one cap in particular that her soul longed after. It had a peak standing up, the like of which had never yet been seen in the glen, and might wile "a second ploughman" before he knew what was happening to him. In five minutes, however, the draper was down the road and Jeannie was locking the back door with nothing but hope to feed upon—the hope that next time Miss Moray would be out of the way, and not able to keep a lassie either from spending her substance or hearing any news about folks.

Miss Moray did not mean to allow a next time. With some heat in her face and a magisterial air, she saw him go on to Kilpirn as she and Lauder turned into the policies of Ashludie, and it did not occur to her that he might coolly return on his steps and be actually unfolding his wares again, or at any rate, some of them, while she was talking to Mrs. Renwick and recovering her self-possession before dinner. Still less did it occur to her that an hour later, instead of going

back to town at a reasonable hour, he would find an easy way to Susan Campbell's presence, and that she, "needing some bits o' things," would be amenable to the coaxing patter of the lad and give him his tea before he left, and discover that she and his mother were fellow-servants for a short time before either of them married. This, however, was what happened. Susan Campbell had nothing to do, only to thole the invasion of her kitchen and pantries by a cook and two waitresses from town; she was rather in need of diversion; and the tallyman appealed to her, personally, though she rather disapproved of his trade.

As for Jeannie, she obtained that cap, and formed a conviction that a travelling draper who meant to "push" had more to recommend him than a second ploughman, for, to mention nothing else, his wife could live in town, with shops and gas-lamps and tramway-cars all over the place.

So Jeannie had one hour of glorious life and the peaked cap to look at afterwards, and the tallyman kept his ears open and did not waste his time. They were rather big and ugly, as ears are apt to be nowadays, and stuck out from his head in a way to catch whatever might be floating past. And he had a curiosity of his own—no unlawful one—to satisfy. He wanted to know the new laird's intentions towards Donal' Howie, who was a public institution in Baldragon, and a sort of sea-green incorruptible, supposed

to be incapable of seeking lands and houses for himself. If D. H. went in for being a laird, it would be news to the Labour party at the Weavers' Hall. "That would be a telling!" said the lad to himself. It was hardly conceivable; and yet where is the man who will throw away the heirship to an estate?

"They'll hate him if he falls into it, though," remarked the draper. "My word, they will!" It seemed worth watching, and he bade Jeannie keep up her heart and "be aye at somethin'," and he'd "cry in again in a whilie."

Among other things he had learnt the name of the young lady in the pretty white frock, and how she was Miss Moray's niece and was going to be the provost's lady in Baldragon. And when the flat tin box and the bundle were repacked with these items instead of sundry soft goods, the bearer went his way to the station of Whitehouses, contentedly leaving the quarrymen's cottages and the U. P. manse for another afternoon. He had "done no' that bad," and he liked the look of Jeannie.

"But, sirs, what a dame yon is!" This was a comment on Miss Moray. "Preserve 's, she near took my head off! She's got a bonnie niece. They're about as much alike as—as a sweet-pea and a marigold. However, that's naething! My mither couldna tell me for her own bairn if she went by the look. It's real odd, now, that my mither and Mistress Campbell should have been

neighbours when they were young. The world's awfu' small! Ye'd think the West Coast of Africa and the East Coast of Scotland were 'adjacent parts,' as they say, wi' just a dyke between them."

So the packman, ambling on to the train. He was a link in a thin strong chain of circumstance, and somehow, without knowing, he half suspected it. So did Miss Moray.

* * * * *

"You've never seen the house, Mrs. Renwick?" said Lauder. "Oh, we must show it to you! Don't you think you could manage? You shall have a support on each side, and the stairs are not so *very* tiring. To think that you've never been over the house of Ashludie!"

Lauder would allow nothing concerning stairs or passages to be a difficulty. She never saw difficulties either for herself or other people when it occurred to her with any force to do something. And the idea of showing Mrs. Renwick the old place took possession of her. It must be done. They would carry her, if she was not afraid to let them—carry her in a rug and promise faithfully not to bump.

Mrs. Renwick answered gaily, with the prettiest flush on her worn cheek. She did not endorse the rug proposal, however. "If you think of it, my dear, I never go anywhere," she said. "This is a great occasion for me, coming so far, and but for Mr. Rattray's kindness about the carriage it couldn't have been."

"He *is* kind, isn't he?" said Lauder wistfully. It was early in the evening. The girl had been sitting beside Mrs. Renwick and showing her first one thing, then another, from the tables and cabinets. These she had seen before, of course, but that did not matter. It was a joy to her to have Lauder near, and bright, and daughterly; to watch the sweet strength of her face and movements, and hear her speak in that voice so difficult to describe, so unlike every other in its fresh softness. The girl was at her very best—eager and tender, frank and dignified. Mrs. Renwick listened, watched, sighed. So, perhaps, did some one else who was not far off. Then the patchwork was alluded to, and discovery made that a person who lived as near as the U. P. manse had never seen this monument, nor the room Prince Charlie slept in when he came to Ashludie.

"To think of it!" as Lauder said. "Will you be carried in a chair, Mrs. Renwick, if you're afraid of the rug? I must have you through the house to-night. It may be the last time I'll go myself—the last time."

Her brow clouded. She sat a minute with the fingers of one hand tightening over those of the other, and her eyes fixed on the floor. Raising them, she found Mrs. Renwick looking at her with a close and pitiful inquiry. Soul to soul, the older and the younger woman spoke silently in that glance, and both trembled, for the truth

had passed between them. Then Lauder sprang up and marshalled a little procession. Mrs. Renwick's son supported his mother on one side, the Established minister, who was indeed a pillar of the Church, on the other. She was enjoined to make full use of them and "lean not on her own understanding." Donal' Howie and the schoolmaster were sent in front with a lamp a-piece; Lauder came next, arm-in-arm with the doctor's wife; any one who liked was at liberty to follow after.

And the ghosts had a calling. Lauder led her company up and down and in and out and recounted all the story of the grey old house. The lamps flickered, the little procession crowded after them round the narrow corners, the story went on, and Hugh Renwick marched to the voice that told it. The Kilpirn minister held up Mrs. Renwick with a strong arm and some of his best jokes, and sound "Voluntary" as she was, she had, perforce, to rely on the Establishment, for her son's head was "in a creel," as they say. He was following the hidings and the searchings of 1630 and the 'Fifteen and the 'Forty-five as they rang from Lauder's lips and gloomed in the shadows of the house. He almost thought himself one of the family of the covenanting Moray who was hunted by soldiers in the den, and escaped them by climbing up a mass of ivy to a window—here it was, giving upon a narrow

bit of stair—whence he reached the secret chamber in a wall and lay hidden there until one wild night, when neither spies nor soldiers were abroad, it was thought safe for him to go out the way he came in, and so he got to the coast, and over seas, and lived to return and dwell undisturbed in his own castle after all, and to help many who had been less fortunate.

Here was the place where the chamber opened, at the back of a great wardrobe. And here, to tell a quite different story, was the room the Prince slept in, or perhaps did not sleep at all, only spent the night in. Here was the quilt that covered him, the mirror that reflected his face. And now, this is Lady Nickie's chamber, where she dressed herself in the soldier's clothes to ride with the Prince to Mid-Ferry—gay, clever Lady Nickie!

Did Hugh Renwick march to this tale also? Yes, and would have followed all night, had the speaking voice continued and the cream-white figure moved in the flickering lamps, on and on. A dream held him, carried him with it; a something which closed the ears to everything else and filled the soul with a wonderful wild charm. To the day of his death, and beyond it in the new birth, Renwick will remember the sweeping through him of that spell, the dream in which he and the white lady marched to the sound of old tales of courage and fidelity. A music that made the heart beat high was in her voice.

XXII

"A RING ON HER FINGER"

THE procession ended in the dining-room, where the portraits hung to which the stories belonged, and then the little crowd melted away, and Hugh Renwick, still wrapt in spell and dream, found himself alone with white-robed Lauder. How it happened neither of them knew; perhaps his mother did. They were there, at any rate, in a sudden silence, with a range of pictured faces behind them on either side. King and Pretender looked out of the dark panelled walls, the Morays who gave life and estate for them were there, and he who risked all in another cause; and in the midst was Claverhouse. The faces looked down upon a table that might have been set for one of the old feasts; the ancient silver sconces had candles burning low in them as on the night when the Prince rose from supper and went away; across the hall parlour, from the withdrawing-room on the other side, came the

notes of a song, low and plaintive: "Will ye no' come back again?"

Better lo'ed ye couldna be.
Will ye no' come back again?

Tall and slender, in her pure gown, Lauder stood beside the table and looked up at the portrait of Clavers. A hanging lamp threw a soft radiance on her own clear-cut, living features, and Hugh Renwick, at the end of the table, not very far away, saw nothing else. The world for him at that moment meant a room, dim and long, a light upon a face, a hand resting on a table within reaching distance, and between, around, a palpitating uncertainty which seemed to include a hope.

"Isn't he handsome?" she said all at once. It was like a little shot fired over the table. Renwick started. She went on with a reckless bit of defence for the man who was too lovely in person, too daring in temper, too proud and high-placed, to be anything but a demon. The form, the temper, the opportunity, could come to nothing else. There he glimmered! superb, inscrutable.

"Who?" said Renwick, and followed Lauder's eyes, and woke out of his dream with a stound.

"Him! He belonged to the party of the devil, and my ancestor, whom they hung, as one might slay a beast, is one of God's glorified in heaven. Praise to the martyrs of our faith!"

He threw up his head and faced the beautiful,

dangerous eyes that gleamed out of the dim wall.

"Give you honour, give you rank, give you a king's ear and a king's writ—send you over God's moor to hunt God's men—yet shall you not prevail, Clavers! Wherever there are fearers of God my name is better than yours; wherever liberty and truth are loved, Renwick is the man, not you, Viscount of Dundee!"

A singular pride throbbed in the deep voice; a passionate faith. It made Lauder's heart beat like the sound of martial music. She believed in religion, in the Church, but she didn't believe like this. Was it not, after all, better than anything else? Were you ever really dull or lonely when you felt *that*, knew *that*? She realised how much the soul can let go, how much it can hold, as she looked at Hugh Renwick. He had his duty set him, and his own joy—a solemn, lonely thing, but deep and real. In the shadowy old room, among the ghosts of men and women who had dared greatly for a Cause and known how to bear losses gallantly, Lauder stole a quick glance at the young Seceder. He was one of them, in his own way. He might never travel out of this strath, never see the cities of the world or their wonders, but he would live faithful to his call, and go from little Whitehouses to his reward. And as Lauder looked she did reverence. The great Cause of all was still being fought for.

It was still good, to some people, to have little of the world, much faith in something unseen, intangible. The deep sigh of the spiritual nature, recognising its own kindred and country, claiming its own destiny, rose in Lauder's breast.

It strained her. She stood silent. The tale of the Morays went by like a sough in the night, like a dream when one awaketh, and beside their supper-table stood a girl with a life to live.

One hand, folding close over the other, felt a ring which enclosed a third finger, and more than the finger. It set a bound for life and love and liberty—the liberty that is so dear, so needful. Lauder looked up and spoke quickly. Her words sounded very strange to the young man whose serious eyes were fixed upon her.

"Why don't you go to the mission field, Mr. Renwick?" said Lauder. "I would, if I were you. I wonder any man would stay about a country-side as a meenister." She actually gave it that little turn of the tongue, though, indeed, she was quite in earnest. The mission field—anywhere—if one were a man and able to go! Wild thoughts flitted through her head for a moment or two. But he supposed she was laughing at him and his work.

"I have thought of it," he answered, in a stern short tone. She turned and gave him a startled look, the eyes wide open, a sudden arrest, as it were, in the frank impatience of the face. His

eyes, firm and dark, met hers, and held them for more than a moment, for several, for an hour as it seemed to her. He was asking a silent question, and she was trying not to answer it. Then he said, slowly, "I have thought much of it, lately. The Calabar River, particularly."—Did he see her shudder as she drew back a little from the table, her face paling—did he see it? He went on: "The old work lies waiting to one's hand there, among the people that sit in darkness. I believe I shall go when——"

"When you find that you must have 'mair room for your feet,' as Mr. Rattray says." She spoke in her lightest tone. When you are afraid of life, burn candles; the more afraid, the more candles; never mind though they splutter. In the dusk of the long room and the silent conclave of those whose daring was over, with Miss Nickie glimmering out of one dim wall to Clavers on the other, Lauder lit up her little candles of pride and hope and a girl's resolution, and flickered them in Hugh Renwick's white face. "No doubt you'll go, before long," she said, "when the days are about forty hours long; and the weeks spin out to a lifetime; and the Whitehouses folk are saying over again everything they ever did say, and—and it's all in the usual—coming to nothing!"

It was not his life she was describing at all; it might be a woman's at the Craig.

"We are never like that in a manse," he replied

gently. "Come in some time and speak with my mother. She will tell you that no day is quite long enough for the work, and that every week is a new chapter—if it were only for my sermons. She thinks there is no life in the world like that of the country manse."

Lauder had nearly said, "Oh, the sermons!" in a tone of rebellion; but the image of Mrs. Renwick, sitting in the manse pew, listening with her whole soul to her son, the image of Mrs. Renwick hirpling out of church and speaking softly to the folk as she went, checked the cry of the young rebel. Lauder loved Mrs. Renwick with a deep silent homage, would fain have gone often to see her, might have told many things if she had, and burned fewer candles. She knew it; but even in Whitehouses, when you pass a place every day, there may be hindrances.

"I like fine to have tea with your mother and hear her talk," said Lauder, simply and half unconsciously, like a child. A slight movement close beside startled her. Was it a hand sliding along the table-edge?

"Do you? Then please come again—come often," said a low voice. "She would be so delighted!"

"With me? Oh no! I'm one of the Jacobites. Miss Nickie, behind there, is my friend."

She half turned to glance at Miss Nickie's pale, high-cut, irregular Highland face, with the gleam

in her dark eye and the sharp energy in every line—Miss Nickie, who served the Chevalier at this table, and kissed his shoe-lace and stole it for a keepsake. It lay in a box in the drawing-room, that same lace; they had smiled over it a little while ago. Why? It was a pity there was nothing of the sort to be done now. "She looks all alive, as if she would come out and have the ploy over again," said Lauder. "But there's no chance. I wish there were!"

What was a descendant of the Covenanters to say? There were people here, it seemed, who sat in darkness and scorned to be converted. They were singing in chorus now on the other side of the house, and the voices rang across the hall-parlour. "Will ye no' come back again?" they cried melodiously. Miss Lauder caught up the refrain and returned it through the old chamber where so many feet had waited for those who came and went from the oaken door a few steps below. And Renwick asked himself why he had left his manse for this flickering of will-o'-th'-wisps.

Lauder sang away. If there were only a Chevalier lying *perdu* in the den of Ashludie, waiting to be brought in and fed and waited upon, and ridden with—as Miss Nickie rode—through the dark night to the riverside over at Mid-Ferry, and taken down in a boat with the ebbing tide to the open waters and the friendly sloop that lay off North Beach, and so the King is saved—oh,

if there were only something of this sort to be done, one would not need to think how the days could be enlivened! Think of it!—Going up the den under the high bank and whispering that all was ready; stealing in at the little door in the turret at the side of the house; then the supper and the serving and bringing the horses into the courtyard, that dull square place where nothing ever happens now; the muffling and bridling and leading out and up the glen—for a blind, that!—and the walk over the hill, and the quick gallop across country to the black river and the little boat! Ah! ah! It is Ina who is singing now, in that lovely voice of hers, about going

Over the water to Sk—ye!

with the very music of loyalty in the sweet half-minor strain, like the lap of the Hebridean sea among the rocks. "Yes, I'd have given that lad my heart," said Lauder, with a curious wild note in her voice. It was as if she were taking a leap off a brink.

"Oh no, no!" said the young minister quickly. "Not you—never!" He laid his hand on her arm to stay her. She gave him one glance, the swiftest, and her eyes were on the smooth riddle of Clavers' face again.

"Oh, you mean I am not a Moray! But the Carters could keep faith, too. They did, you know, when *the gentleman* was hiding, down there!"

"You are a Moray as much as any one——" He stopped, struggling with himself. "But this is a new day; the old doings are not good enough."

"There's nothing half so good," she answered him, her head up. "If I'd been a Moray here, a hundred and fifty years ago, I'd have enjoyed myself."

"Dancing with Claverhouse, after the killing?" he said sternly.

Lauder would not give in.

"He's real fine-looking," she remarked, "and I'm sure he could dance."

"And if I had been the rebel he was after?" If Hugh Renwick trembled just then it was not with cold, as he stood there, the minister of a Secession kirk—a barn-like meeting-house—with Clavers looking down and Miss Lauder looking up, infatuated, and all the Moray spirit in her face.

"And if I had been the rebel he was after, would you have gone on dancing?" A light yet strong hand beat on the edge of the table. His own was not more than a few inches away, hanging loose. It needed something to do, for it was full of muscle and warmth; he had some trouble to keep it still while he put his question a third time. "*And if I had been the rebel, Miss Lauder?*" The words were spoken so low they seemed like a prayer. "*And my dear mother, down-by?*" A wailing note came across the hall; the supper-room echoed it; the sound seemed to belong to the moors and the

praying folk—the folk who always conquered though you killed them. Lauder held herself together and felt like a Lot's wife with something cold and grim hardening all round her living heart.

"*You?*" She tried to speak, but the hardening went on, the image grew stiff and tight. At this rate there would be no more dancing: never any more—"*You?*"

"Yes." The voice came very near and yet sounded like a sentence of judgment. "Are you turning into a woman of the world?" it said. And then everything broke up. Some one—it couldn't be a young minister, who always seemed so composed, not to say reserved, and was believed to have his heart in his work—but some one cried out as if he were mortally hurt; and his face was all white and set; and Lauder was staring at him with wide, frightened eyes, her healthy cheeks pale and hard, too, as if one blow had struck them both; and presently . . .

* * * * *

Come away. We have no business in that shadowy old room just now. The little candles of a girl's lighting have flickered out; a wind has rushed in and thawed the frost that caught her. Is it love? But Love can be terrible when you have set the feast for some one else. He must go away: Lauder cannot give a cup from the table to him. He pleads hunger and thirst; he

takes her hand and entreats; her head is bowed, her tears fall; voices are heard singing, a dream of loyalty and devotion seems to fill the air, but ah!——

"I am promised! I am promised! It is to be in April. Anyway, it must be in some April. Oh, it's too late now!"

And that is all she can say to her Covenanter. The lights go out. Youth cannot give sight to Love, cannot answer his cry. Honour comes like a ghost and lays a chill finger upon hands that would fain clasp. Oh, Lauder! Oh, Love!—Is it really too late?

XXIII

IN EARNEST

ON the other side the house Fleming Guthrie sang to Ina Rattray the verses he had made for her.

> Bonnie lassie, sweet-voiced lassie,
> Gloamin' brings ye near,
> And my heart runs out to meet ye,
> Bounding like a deer.

He had a fine tenor voice, but he spoke the words low and gently, and the piano was set at the far corner from the fire, so the song was quite between him and the gentle girl in a soft brown dress who stood beside the instrument. She had her back to the room and the older folk; no one could see her face but Fleming Guthrie, and he wanted to see nothing else. She looked down; a pattern in the faded old carpet seemed to interest her a good deal; her hands hung loosely clasped; her frock was rather plain as usual—a bit of lace frilling at the neck, a little gold brooch, no frippery—but with the quiet gracefulness of her figure, the quiet intensity of her face,

it seemed just the right thing: one asked no other charm. At any rate, the man did not who was singing. He had never enjoyed anything so much in his life as reciting these verses of his to that pure face. A free-lance, a wanderer, he had left or liked as he pleased; but now he could no longer rove. A slim figure, a still face, had mastered him. He had criticised many women, fancied a few; now he desired this one with all the heart and soul that were in him—desired her for the ornament of his castle and the keeper of himself. That he needed a keeper, he knew, but never before did he think of taking one.

The song ceased.

"I'm thinking Fleming Guthrie is caught at last," said Miss Moray to the laird at the other side of the room.

"Aye! Has he been ill to catch?" asked James Rattray, in the same quiet tone that Miss Moray had used, as if they were speaking of the weather. "No' that Ina would seek to wile him or any other chap. He'll have to work at it before he gets her to himself."

"Toots! She's a lass like the rest. She'll want her own man and her own way; and if they're both handsome she'll have the better luck," said the heiress of the Carters, folding her fingers comfortably. They were seldom idle, those fingers, as one might tell by the look of them. She sat back in one easy chair and looked at the fire,

and the laird leaned back in another and looked at her. She knew he was doing that, and he was welcome: she considered herself quite worth his attention.

"That's what all you women folk would like, as I understand—your ain man and your ain way," said the laird, settling himself and trying to find some side pockets wherein to bestow his hands. For once he wore something like company dress, and the pockets were to seek.

"Wer ain way-o'-doing," corrected Miss Moray. "I have that, mysel', praise be thankit; and for the man, I could have had that, too, if I'd thought I'd be any the better. But men folk are a sore trachle."

"Would you say so, now, Miss Moray? You're gey hard on us." The large face wore a benign expression. You would hardly have thought he was the same man who had sometimes called in at the Craig, and, as it were, seated himself on the bench and placed the mistress at the bar to answer for this and the other thing about Lauder. Miss Moray was off her guard with him this evening. April was not far off, and then Lauder's fate would be handsomely settled; no one would be able to say that she lacked anything. There had been a good lot of troubles, but they were wearing past. If James Rattray and other meddlesome fellows would just keep quiet, everybody might be as well off and comfortable as there was any use expecting

to be in this world. "I'm hard on nobody so long as they give me peace," said Miss Moray; "I've done my best, and if others will do the same, we's a' manage well enough."

"Ye dinna regret anything?" There was just a tinge of the magistrate again, just a glance of the eye. She threw them back.

"Me regret no' being cumbered with one o' you men bodies? Is it likely, now?"

"Vera likely, I should say, mum. You have na half enough room for your talents at the Craig; ye should have been here."

"Well,"—she bridled a little and faced him,—"I would have been here if I'd married my cousin, Sir Victor."

"Aye? That was in the wind, was it?"

Miss Moray had the conscience not to say yes; she let it go by implication. In fact, by this time she kind of believed that she had chosen "no' to be bothered" with the French cousin.

"And if ye'd taken him years ago, it's more than likely I'd never have had the chance to buy Ashludie."

"More than likely, as ye say," answered the lady.

"Well, well! it's queer how things go linking, linking together, and never a body sees what they're shaping to. It was that way then, when you and me were young, and it's that way now."

There was an odd little pause, as there had been before in the talk of this pair. The laird looked

round the room, and took in the figures at the piano, and finished with Miss Moray.

"It's fine when folk are prepared for whatever may come," he said wistfully. "I wonder what the minister's finding in the old house to keep him so long. It would be an awful-like thing if he and Miss Lauder came on some secret hidden away in a press or a dark corner."

"It would do them neither good nor ill. But you're right—they're a long time."

A sudden uneasiness struck the mistress of the Craig. One thing would certainly be awful-like; namely, if John Thomson were put off again, and especially—— She half rose in her chair.

"Sit ye down, mum. If there's anything about this auld tower of Ashludie that needs bringing to the light o' day, I'll no' hinder the finding o't, for my part. D'ye ken, I often think there is something?"

"I ken that you're speaking riddles," said Miss Moray curtly; "and I was never good at them." She sat upright. The laird could not let a body spend an hour in peace.

"Dinna be angry, now. You and me are to be friends, whatever happens, Miss Moray. We're a pair o' sinners, forby neighbours, and——"

"Speak for yoursel', laird, speak for yoursel'! A pair o' sinners, said he!"

"And the mair fit to keep one another company. I've a great liking for ye, Miss Moray, and that's no riddle, I'm sure. I hope it's no offence."

"It's as ye make it. But I'm for peace, and doing my best, and no' being challenged at every turn. You're a gey queer kind o' friend."

A little pause again.

"Well, you have me there," he answered slowly, a very serious look on his large flabby countenance. "I am, that's a fact. It's truer than you ken o'. And a' the same . . . there's a pair of us, mum, a pair of sinners. I hope the Lord means to be merciful wi' us when the redding-up day comes."

"If it's a faut, it's no ferlie," was the stout reply. "If ye're to redd up everything there'll be a heap to do. I dinna bother myself. I'm no' to go fidgeting through the world like a poor farmer that canna trust himsel' to buy kye. There's never a bargain but cheated somebody, if ye speired. I dinna speir; I just work away."

"You're a cool hand," said the laird.

"I'm a business woman, and I ken what it is to go to market," she answered. "And now I'm thinking there has been quite enough showing of this house to a young man who'll never need to know his way about it."

She bustled up and out of the room, and the laird sat looking into the fire. Her last phrase clung curiously to his ear: "This house; a young man who'll never need to know his way about it." Of course not! Fleming Guthrie was more likely; any one could see that he was going to be a friend, and the prospect pleased James Rattray mightily.

This bonnie niece of his was fit for any place the world of Scotland could afford, and Fleming Guthrie seemed near all that could be wished by a girl or a guardian. He might be "light weight," but so is much pleasant stuff. He had not to live by his solidity. A good factory, well established, well officered, would find him in funds. Nature had found him in charm and lively intelligence; it was not possible to think of him as bankrupt on either side. And for the rest, the moral side of existence, if there were things which began to be whispered in Baldragon they had not come to James Rattray's ears; Donal' Howie said nothing about them. Yet he heard most of what was said or whispered in the town.

Donald had been talking to the doctor and parish minister. The laird crossed over to them, and presently the men went away to examine a possibility for a billiard room on the ground floor. Mrs. Renwick and the other ladies were left discussing household affairs with their faces to the fire, and about the piano, at the other end of the room, a shadow hung like the cloud which led the Israelites—a darkness full of glow and warmth. Do you think this could only be for Ina? You are wrong. It was for her lover too.

Every man has to be in earnest some time in his career. God's messengers find him once at least, and by a sure touch pierce to the core of him where the spark of the Divine, transmitted through the

generations, lies dormant or overborne. These messengers are Love and Loss, and they pursue every soul till, in some world or other, high or low, they come to it and find the moment for using their Ithuriel spears. This is the meaning of the constant cry of the Bible writers; it is the very meaning of life itself. Man does not die as the beasts die, nor pass away like the flowers and fruits of the earth; he has to Continue, to Overcome, to meet the messenger at Peniel, and still, after that encounter, go on to the Better or the Worse of life—to Heaven or Hell.

It is very awful, very splendid, this destiny of the "light weight" called man—this little heir of trade and time. One looks at Fleming Guthrie "making love," and perceives that he does not yet in the least comprehend what is before him.

He is not going to be allowed to "play himself" any more.

Well, he had come so far as not to wish to do so. In his own phrase, he had met Fate and was glad to feel her hand upon him.

The song about the gentle and quiet lassie was sung twice over, and Guthrie murmured the last line of it yet again.

"Did you know I made that?" he said.

Somehow she had suspected as much, but of course did not suppose it to be made for any one in particular. When he further demanded, "It's good, isn't it?" his egotism seemed to Ina like modesty.

"I never heard that you wrote," she answered. —How neatly a shy girl can turn off a thing!— "I wish I could!"

He laughed gaily, happily: another girl in a shepherd's cottage clean forgotten.

"I can't *write*. That's for D. H. and other smart chaps."

"But you can make poetry, and perhaps stories. That's writing, isn't it? I watch Donald when he's at his work, and it seems like a miracle how the things come into his head. I can't understand it!"

"You?" His voice caressed, though he spoke lightly. "Why should you trouble your head?"

"I'd like to," she answered, very simply. "It's fine to be able to make poetry."

He laughed softly again.

"You? You look it, sing it. You are a poem in yourself, you know. That's better."

Fleming Guthrie could say things of this sort dangerously, and there was something in his look before which Ina shrank.

"Oh, please, I don't like to be flattered," she said, more quickly than usual, in her soft Highland voice. Those tones of hers intoxicated an artist like Fleming Guthrie. He had been caught by a face and a trick of manner before; now it was face, voice, soul. Yes, the soul of Ina Rattray, pure and shy, drew him irresistibly. And he had no thought of doing harm. He meant every word, meant it, as he would have said himself, down

to the ground. And she must "mean it" too. He leaned from the piano as Ina drew a little away, and his tone changed. For once, Fleming Guthrie was simple and sincere.

"Miss Rattray," he said, and waited till she had to raise her eyes to meet his. A glance passed between them, and hers fell swiftly. "I don't understand the man who would flatter and talk nonsense to you," said a voice that could hardly have been known for Fleming Guthrie's. "You are truth itself. Isn't that what my little song means? Truth itself, so that one could trust you for all in all, my lassie!"

The last word slipped gently out, like a string sounding of its own accord in the old piano. A man's face, young-looking, quick-coloured, took on a very eager look; the blue eyes filled with feeling. A girl, slender, dark-haired and pale, grew paler still as she looked away. Her eyes, like Highland water, held a dream of what has been and may be, but you must live with it long ere you know its depth.

The string of Love gave forth a sweet keen note, but how softly, how softly! The lamp-lit parlour was undisturbed, the miniatures of pretty ghosts heard nothing to make them rustle; yet two hearts beat quick and high, and a change came over the world for them. Henceforth, in whatever relation they might stand, near or separate, they made the world to each other.

XXIV

"SHOES ON HER FEET"

A YOUNG fellow who had to be a minister went home to his manse asking of the Power that made him why the life of a man should depend on his relation to some woman. For women, the question why their whole existence, body and soul, should be in the hands of men, was asked with emphasis a while ago, and is being answered with equal emphasis to-day. Naturally, Hugh Renwick did not consider the woman's point of view; but his own struck at him like a flame leaping from a furnace as one goes by. Love of a woman—a tender and beautiful hearth-fire. Love of a woman—a disappointment, an ache, a regret. These things he understood, or thought he did. But Love as an anger, scorching the inner life, drying and withering: this he had never imagined. Love that works by cynicism and makes a man angry with himself and his Maker and even his beloved; what is this? Hugh Renwick began to ask questions which had never so much as occurred to him before. To become a cynic had always

seemed a fate reserved for "the worldly man." No real Christian could fall away into that state.

And now he found himself a parched, restless soul, denying the good of the world. How could it be good when Lauder Graham drifted like a leaf on the breeze of impulse, and even a worthy man won her, not because he was worthy, but because he was rich?

So the winter days were tense and biting in the manse among the fields. A young pastor fought for the faith he used to have in a world well governed, in a providence which makes "all things work together for good to them that love God," and the faith was not there when he wanted it. How is a man in this condition to "preach"? It is very hard work; and yet, because, like a blind man feeling for a road, he went searching on Sundays through the Old Testament and the New, through old "Dogmatics" and the by-path meadow of the modern soul—just because of this, a curious feeling got into the Secession kirk of Whitehouses that the minister was going "real deep." In the grey mornings when the lamps were lit for warmth, and the shadow of on-coming snow lay upon the hills and the river, the strait pews felt a "waft," a something pass over them; and from the manse corner Mrs. Renwick regarded her son with tearful pride and wonder, not unmixed with some anger, too, of her own. If only that young lady would come and hear him preach there

could surely be no more doubt in her saucy mind which of her lovers she must take!

Mrs. Renwick said "must"—if only she were in church once or twice.

With this belief, the mother watched her lad wrestling his way through the "exercises" of his calling and the strange lonely exercise of living. Her own soul, silently attending his in its new birth-pangs, learnt things which had hitherto been hid from it—things which even Dr. Brown and Dr. Eadie knew little or nothing of, though they were wise men and Hebraists.

One evening there was a "special lecture," as they called it, to raise money for something—the choir, very likely—and being a fine night, with moon and dry roads, and winter not by any means in possession as yet, the district turned out in force to attend the Secession kirk and contribute pennies a-piece toward the purchase of new hymn-books.

Mr. Rattray always had his "folks" with him on Sundays, and he marched them down. D. H. had a note-book, and it was understood that young Renwick was to be "in *The Toon*" very shortly —portrait, sketch of "career," and future possibilities. The man from Africa seemed as anxious about this and the call to a larger sphere which might be expected to result, as if he had some personal responsibility for the young minister. And Donald was quite willing. He knew the

history—a quaint one—of the kirk in the fields, and saw his way to a rather good thing, although, to be sure, the congregation was not one to buy up an edition of a paper and send it broadcast because their minister's praise was in it. Never mind! It would be all the more credit to *The Toon*, as showing that the editor sought out real talent wherever hidden. So Donald went graciously. Lauder Graham had spent the afternoon at Ashludie, and seemed to be ready for anything out of the common. Since Fleming Guthrie was also of the party, it followed that Donald had Miss Graham to himself, and she did not find him tiresome. If she had, the Secession church had probably not seen her that evening, for she was in a mood to hang a man for a stupid word. But D. H. was clever, biting, unscrupulous—anything but Sabbatarian. He kept her amused all the afternoon; he kept her amused to the very door in the garden wall which enclosed the church and manse.

The road was quite filled with people—"old kirk," Free kirk, and U. P., with a stray Independent or Baptist sheep which had no fold of its own nearer than Insch. They seemed to pack the meeting-house. Lauder could keep well out of sight behind a buirdly farmer and believe herself unseen from the pulpit. Yet in the moment of sitting down among the close ranks of people she began to tremble and to ask herself why

she had come. The inquiry grew more urgent, thumping in her veins and weighing on her breath. It was Lauder's fate often to be angry with herself for her own doings. To-night, she was angry and frightened too. But there she was—hemmed in! It must be gone through with now. The gallery overhead might gradually weigh down and crush the people below; she believed it was going to, and, really, if it would just crack one's head, quick and clean, a worse thing might happen. Lauder's doings would cease to trouble anybody—cease to trouble herself. There would be neither marrying nor giving in marriage for her; finished, then, and over, the awful business of choice. Lauder hated choosing, considering, puzzling over things. A swift moment of impulse, a leap to a decision—afterwards, to be satisfied and full of little duties, with friends coming and going: that is life as she would have it.

There had been such moments with her. On this Sunday she was waiting, half-unconsciously, for another one, illuminating and decisive, something that should say: "Be married in April—be married!" or, perhaps, say something quite different. But suppose no such moment came at all?

* * * * *

"Now," said Donald Rattray to himself, "if he's dry she'll hate him, and if he thumps the Bible and yells, she'll be glad she's engaged to somebody else."

It went neither way, and Lauder could not have told how it went. Her eyes were on a face, her ears heard a voice: of all the prayer and lecture there was only one sentence that she really heard. An impressive black and white figure occupied the space under the sounding-board where a minister, in Scotland, commands by being a servant. Once up there, in the severe grace of Genevan robe and bands, with the Book and the people before him, he is invested with a commission the like of which does not exist anywhere else to-day. It may not exist much longer even in Scotland. Rich ministers and rich flocks, careless ministers and careless flocks, will settle that for themselves and for the rest within the next dozen years. But Hugh Renwick came in a succession which held the pulpit as a fortress. There, if nowhere else, their people bowed before them; there, with the Book, they gave oracles.

And how, then, did no such oracle as she desired come to Lauder Graham? The kirk "scaled," as they say, and neither sounding-board nor gallery had fallen. Not once had the minister's voice torn at people's ears in the way a U. P. congregation used to love. Renwick was but little given to that way at any time, his vigour being of a steady sort. This evening he stood still and straight, and dropped measured words describing the religious life. Augustine and Monica, St. Paul and St. John flitted through it; Tauler was called to bear

witness, and Charles Wesley, and those bright sweet souls, the Guérins; and then the allusions came nearer home, touched, not indefinitely, on "those known to some of you who have lived this life, the life with God, in shepherd huts, on lonely hillsides." It went back to others. "Your forebears, some of them, who in dungeons of a Bass Rock, never felt their chains weigh upon their free souls."—A curious little sentence, that caught a girl's ear and pierced through folds of inward debate and dreaming, and remained a seed in the centre. She seemed to have really heard none of the rest, only this.

Then it was over, and the kirk "scaled." She was walking along a road under the moon and the cloud, and people were talking. "The Religious Life"? But she wanted to hear that decisive Something, that oracle which could not be mistaken; and there was no sound of it.

She fastened herself to Mrs. Campbell and Peter, walking silent, and you might have thought disdainful, between them, while they spoke first of one bit, then of another, in the discourse. If Peter would only scold her again! He might say what he liked. Anything for a chance of splitting the web woven about her, the web which grew tighter every week.

Never felt their chains weigh upon their free souls. Out of thirty-five minutes' preaching, this was all that Lauder Graham carried away. Suppose a

woman married to a kind good man who needs her. That's a chain. Can she ever be so free in her mind as not to feel it? Will she be able to go about in her own happy, careless, wind-in-the-hair manner? A tightening of the soul answers. Lauder does not accommodate herself easily to bonds. One man takes you on jaunts; but he is always there, "personally conducting." Another is young, like yourself, but he offers you a cottage manse in a field, a corner pew by a vestry door where you must sit every Sunday as long as you live, unless he gets "a call." In any case, it can only be to a town manse, and a town church with an organ instead of the old country precentor. A third man—there might be fun with him if you could like him well enough, if you could trust him. And so there it is! a tangle, a criss-cross web catching the breath and the limbs.

Never felt their chains weigh upon their free souls. Well, Mrs. Renwick did not. To her it was a wreath of silk. See her to-night—in church for the third time, her dear, tired old face gleaming, while her back ached so that she could hardly sit up! She was going to bed full of praise and thankfulness for the large congregation that evening, and praying for something—Lauder knew what—with all the faith there was in her. They say the prayers of such an one as Mrs. Renwick are sure to be answered; so there's a chain! While to Lauder, life meant Ashludie as it used to be, or—Leipsic!

Leipsic! Lauder stopped short on the road and looked up to the moon. It gleamed suddenly from the edge of a grey cloud with a bright curious glance, as much as to say, Now, there's an idea for you! And Lauder's heart expanded as though something had been loosened which bound it.

She stood gazing at the lively, suggestive old moon. "The sky's some threatening like," said Peter wisely. What was he havering about? The sky looked as promising as could be for fine weather, and all that fine weather means; and here they were at the cross roads where Dunragit folk turned west and Kilpirn folk turned east, and those who had the right went over to a gate by a lodge and up a drive to a mansion-house. Lauder said good-night graciously to one and another; she went in at the gate with all the air of being the lady to whom it belonged. Donald Rattray came alongside and thought to step with her and discover what she thought of the sermon, but her arm was in Susan Campbell's, who might have been her mother by the way they were holding each other, and to Susan she clung. Donald had to be content with carrying an umbrella and making respectful observations on the minister. His lips tightened up under his moustache. "She's a caution! Upon my word she is!" he said to himself. "I made the time pass for my lady this afternoon and now she seems to prefer the old woman. Couldn't afford a wife

with so many changes of taste, unless——" The *unless* gave him food for study, but when Lauder swiftly bade him and the laird good-night and forgot to make any mention of the sketch for *The Toon*, D. H. felt that with all her charm she lacked something.

Ina and another person were still in the shades of the avenue: Miss Moray went away by the stable court to the short cut for the Craig. Lauder, at a low, nail-studded door said to Susan Campbell, with that fresh *timbre* in her voice which belongs to Lauder alone:

"Susan, I want to ask you and Peter for something. I want you to help me."

She stood at the door just as she had often stood as a child, when she would come demanding Sir Alec. Taller now, a brown wood nymph instead of a fay, but the same Lauder, as eager and spirity if there was anything in her mind. And Susan Campbell answered as she used to answer then:

"I'm sure he'll be too happy to please ye, dearie, if it's in his power. Come into wer ain room, and he'll be in when he's looked at his fire for the houses."

He came shortly. Lauder stepped from the hearth to meet him, and it was:

"Peter, can you lend me twenty pounds? There's no one I'd ask but you."

Peter looked between his eyebrows and his beard.

"I'll lend ye a' what little I have in this warld if it's to do ye any good, Miss Lauder," he said.

"It'll do me any amount of good, Peter, and I'll pay you back some day if you can wait a bit."

"Wait till you're married, do you mean, missie?" said the lean, grizzled man deliberately. Susan stood by the fire plaiting and unplaiting silent questions of her own in the border of her "filled" Sabbath plaid. No modern mantles or jackets for Mistress Campbell. She wore the dress of her mother, a plain black stuff gown, a fine woollen shawl in shades of soft grey, a shape of bonnet which, by waiting, had come very near to being in the height of the fashion. And the old matronhood of Scotland stood there watching Lauder, who had the new craving heart in her breast.

"Do you want to see me married, Peter?"

"Well—yes, missie, provided——"

"Well, I don't care. A little while ago you talked the other way round about, and were all for having me think what I was doing. Now I've been thinking till I'm sick tired. You know, Susan, that I'd rather put off a thing if I don't feel like doing it—put it off and go to something else. That's much better than muddling your head and never seeing any further."

Susan looked and said nothing. She had heard Miss Moray say of Lauder, at more points than one in their mutual history, "She's getting that restless, the creature, I dinna ken what to do with her." It seemed as though this might be the case just now. Susan herself had been

restless these few days back, with a thought which could not be set aside, but would take a good deal of turning over and considering. Had the same thing reached Miss Lauder in any shape or form?

"And so, missie?" said Peter.

"And so I'm going off to dear old Leipsic as soon as ever I can get the money."

Leipsic all the way? And what would she do there? they wanted to know. Lauder explained bluffly that she supposed she could get some teaching.

"English—the three R's—anything! And if not, I'll pay you back some other way, Peter."

"You'll pay it back, Miss Lauder, when you're freely able, and no' a minute sooner. Now, let's see!"

He had some ado to keep a dry, judicial face and tone, and not to seem so ready as he really was to help this very improper scheme. He had no need to look at Susan, nor she to try to catch his eye. Each knew the sense of relief that the other felt. Miss Lauder was taking things into her own hands. Well and good! A nearer place than Leipsic might have done, that was all. That, and the stipulation, "You'll let's know all your doings, Miss Lauder, and when you're ready to come back? Dinna hurry yoursel', and mind ye, if anything happens here, I'll send word im*me*dently," said Peter. While Susan's only concern seemed to be for flannels—plenty of flannels for winter weather. Never did two elderly

stay-at-homes take so lightly the idea of a journey, an adventure. The girl who had been afraid to speak, who had expected to have to fight for her scheme, grew wistful, herself. Things were too easy.

"You don't seem at all afraid that I'll get lost or have anything happen to me," she remarked. "Auntie Bella will be saying this and that and the other thing, and raging at me."

"The less need to do it here, then," was Peter's reply. "Ye'll no' be telling her to-night, will ye? That's a' richt! I'll see aboot the money to-morrow, and ye can keep your mind easy. Some way, I dinna think Miss Moray 'll raise any serious objections."

"Not if you're set on going, Miss Lauder," put in Susan. She knew why she spoke. Lauder turned with a flash.

"I don't know what I'm set on," she cried. "Nothing but having my life! Why should that be so difficult?"

Then she kissed Susan, quickly and gently—the woman who had given her all the mothering she had known—and Peter saw her through court and coppice to the gate of the Craig, where he solemnly pronounced the old Hebrew and Scots benediction over her: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

And so Peter went back to consult with his Susan, and Lauder, half the night, heard the wind beating

over the trees with a strange demand for life, life! The rush of it, the sense of going with it, sent her to sleep at last.

* * * * *

Next morning Susan interviewed the laird, and the laird interviewed Peter, and then a message was sent to Miss Moray asking her to step down and advise about some order for new bed linen. This brought the mistress of the Craig in good time and a good mood, and when she had satisfied herself and "given a' the directions," as Susan said, the laird caught her in a passage and had her into his own room to advise about something else—namely, a present that he wanted to give to Miss Lauder.

"Just a bit present I want her to have, Miss Moray, and she's to do whatever she likes with it, mum. The lassie is no' so happy as she ought to be. She's made to be the light o' somebody's eyes and the joy o' somebody's heart, but she canna be if she thinks——"

"Thinks what?" said Miss Moray, with a Carter glance.

"You should ken better than me, mum. But it disna matter. Her and my niece are two fine creatures, and I'd like to put a sma' purse in their hands, each o' them, for anything they may fancy. They'll do nae ill wi't. I thought I'd tell ye, Miss Moray. It's a condition that the lassies do the spending in their own way."

"I'm sure I'm no' caring," replied the mistress, with some surprise. "It's as you please, laird; and very kind of you, I'm sure."

"You will care when you know," he replied. "But it's settled. She's to go."

"Who's to go—where? Now what's this o't, Mr. Rattray?"

The laird explained that Miss Lauder had a school friend in Germany with whom she corresponded, as Miss Moray knew, and she was going to spend Christmas with her and have some skating, and make a good long visit; and when she came back it would be a new year.

Miss Moray fixed her eyes on the laird with a look that changed as he proceeded. At the end she was intensely angry and curiously quiet.

"Very well, laird, very well; you and me'll have to speak again' about this. I'm away to my dinner," was all her answer as she left him. She had thoughts which refused words and prompted, rather, some peremptory deed which yet she knew she must leave undone. Muttered sentences fell from her lips as she left the mansion-house.

"He can just adopt her, and then she needna take John Thomson after a'. The loon Donal' Howie might suit her notions best. There's no saying. But I'm to be made look like an auld fule, anyway."

And for a whole week she hardly spoke to Lauder. Then the girl went on her journey.

XXV

ENCOURAGING A YOUNG MAN

"NOW here's a new member wanted for Baldragon, my man, and your chance has come. We maun set to work immediately," said the laird, entering the office of *The Toon* and addressing the editor. It was a small back room at the bottom of a well of tenement buildings, and the proverbial cat, if swung there, might have found all its nine lives insufficient to contend with the four walls. In fact, a cat of any refinement would have expired at the first contact with the very grimy walls of that editorial den. Nevertheless, *The Toon* continued to come out with great brilliance every Friday.

Donald rose and offered his uncle the editorial arm-chair. It was suited to his own proportions, not to the laird's, but Mr. Rattray took the edge of it as well as he could and leaned hard on the table.

"And now we maun set to work," he repeated. There had been talk for awhile of the senior member for Baldragon being promoted to some Government post. At last it had happened. He was going to a governorship and the seat would

be vacant. Now was the time for the Unionists and the Democrats and any other party that wanted to divide votes and slip in the thin end of a political wedge. "Labour questions" were very much "to the front," and the temperance reformers were determined to be heard, and Lord Pitfour was going to send his son and heir to capture the constituency in the interests of modern feudalism—which wears a quite different dress and speaks a quite different language from the old thing, and is somewhat less robust, but means, always, to be a Power somehow, and hold the suzerainty. Young Pitfour was to be on the ground for certain; there were even whispers that the Duke of Holy Island was to send forth a candidate on behalf of the Catholic church and recall Baldragon to its ancient —very ancient—faith. He would appeal to the forty thousand Irish and Scoto-Irish Catholics of the borough and call himself a Liberal Socialist. So *The Baldragon Mail* had announced that cool March morning.

"It's going to be a shindy," said the laird. "But you're to stand, of course?"

Donald was standing, at the moment, on his own feet and in his own interest. "No fears!" he answered. "I'm on for this, I assure you. And so is Fleming Guthrie, I believe."

"Aye, aye! But he calls himself a Constitutionalist; he'll never get in. He has no chance at all."

"Not much, in the meantime; but you'd wonder!"

"I would wonder if Baldragon returned a Tory. Besides, they dinna believe in Fleming Guthrie, someway. But you're to manage it, I hope. There's more than one denomination of you Democrats, of course. D'ye expect they'll all rally to ye?"

"To me as well as to another. Anyway, I'm going to be the man in front with the flag. They can come after me if they like, and if they don't like they needn't."

He sat down on the table as if he were taking his seat for Baldragon, and the laird looked at him and thought that D. H. was cool enough to succeed in anything.

"You'll go through with it if we once begin to the job, though? You'll not withdraw?"

"Not me! I'll go to the poll. Suppose I'm at the bottom, it'll be a beginning, at any rate. Everything has a beginning."

Not much about the Cause yet. Ina had been very enthusiastic over its prospects at breakfast; she was staying at Ashludie; but the editor of *The Toon* seemed to be taking a view which made even the cause of labour a link in a longer chain, so far as Baldragon was concerned.

"I shall call myself a Progressive," said Donald, "and I think a good lot of the working-men will vote for me. If they don't, I'm much mistaken. I shall promise them the Eight Hours' Day and

free tramways and baths and washing-houses all over the town. That'll catch the women."

"That's just a lot of trash. It wouldn't have caught anybody where I was brought up," said Mr. Rattray rather gruffly. He began to see that he was past middle age and the world was very young.

"Oh, that's only the advertisement! Afterwards I'll make a good deal of the democratic empire that's building up all over the world for the benefit of the working classes. No trash there—a splendid fact! You'll be a tower of strength to me when it comes to this, don't you see?—Australia for the artisan and sheep farmer; India for the promising lads who can pass examinations; and AFRICA for anybody and everybody. Three cheers for British Africa, from Cairo to the Cape! And you'll be there, uncle, to make it all real. I may even manage to get in on the heads of it." He sat up very straight; his dark eyes burned, his lithe little figure was all alive. The laird subscribed to the programme on the spot. Every one knows that as the times change you must change with them. Throw a sprat to catch a whale—and so on.

"Make a good appearance, at any rate," he said. "Let folk see what you're fit for, lad, whether you're returned or not; and strike a blow for your cause."

"Just that!" answered the young man, a keen

dream in his face. You may lose the first move or two in a big game; afterwards, when you see how the pieces lie and what they may do, you can devise moves that will not fail. D. H. felt that he could in any case thoroughly depend upon his own smartness. *Afterwards* seemed a very important word. He looked through the window. It did not lend itself to clearness of vision, but his sight was strong. One storey—two storeys—three—four and attics: a man had to climb by one set of stairs and another to the top of his desire. It didn't matter much what the stairs were like; you must take them as they are made if you wish to mount.

"It will cost a good deal," said the young fellow suddenly. He came back like a pigeon from the roof to the ground, and began to mark figures on a sheet of paper. "This is a compact constituency, but you must let them see you're at work or it's no use. It can't be done for a trifle."

The laird quite understood that he was being asked a question.

"Well, I'm to pay the bill if ye dinna let it be o'er big. Ye needna scrimp and ye needna throw money away."

"Thanks very much," answered Donald. If he was ever in earnest in his life he was at this moment. A thin sharp flush rose on his very pale cheek, and gave him, momentarily, a different look.

"That's all right," returned the laird.

For the slightest overdose of gratitude he was fit to withdraw his offer and bolt out of the place. "Name your agent, and I'll tell him how far he can go. I never stuck at a few strings of beads or a bit of cloth when I wanted to do trade, and though this is a bigger deal, I can manage it, I expect. Get you in, if you can, and I'll be real proud o' ye; and anyway make the other chaps work for their money. Syne——" Yes—*afterwards*. What may a fellow not see through a dirty office window? "Syne I'll make my will!" said Mr. Rattray.

It was not made, then! And meantime, Donald H. Rattray was the heir-at-law. This was an interesting fact. There were other facts which might or might not be interesting, just as they happened to turn out. Were they also situated in that very narrow and deep well between grimy walls? Donald sat staring.

"By the way, ye're engaged to be married, are ye not?" said Mr. Rattray, rather suddenly. He leaned on the table with one elbow and with the other on the arm of the chair, a broad, homely, shrewd figure.

Donald, as ready a little Scot, keen, and black and "lifey," as one could see in a long day between Aberdeen and Thrums, answered promptly:

"Na! I've a lot to do before I can think about that. Unless——"

He went on marking the paper. It is a mistake

to call such a product as D. H. a Celt. He is a Picto-Norman, with dashes of everything, but less Saxon than aught else, or, with that element as the clay in the dark fibrous peat.

"Is that it?" said the laird. "Someway I thought——" He sat still and half asleep, seemingly, but his small eyes were on his nephew. Donald made no further remark. It appeared as if the subject were of no importance. "I thought, someway," repeated Mr. Rattray, "that there was a lassie. Ina mentioned it."

Donald's flush had gone: he was very white and black.

"Oh, I won't say but there has been something! Most lads take a fancy or two before they settle. And Ina is full of romance, ye ken. She's never had a fancy, so of course she understands all about it. A kiss is a vow to her."

"Aye, aye!" He sighed as he spoke; his tone was dry. "She's true to the core of her—true and fine. *She* thinks ye're engaged, my man."

"But I am not. I only want to be."

"Oh, that's the way! Well, the lassies like a victory; so get votes enough to make ye wer junior member, and the marriage can be the next thing. Dinna wait till ye're far up the stairs in some grand post. You and her will enjoy the end o' your days far better if ye begin them together; that's what I think. She has no cash, I suppose?"

"Well—there's no sign of any," answered the young man. He looked up from his paper with a little start.

"Not if she's an assistant teacher, of course."

"Oh, that's Ina's friend you're speaking of—Ina's romance! If there ever was anything in that, it's quite over. The young lady I wish to marry, if I can, is a mutual acquaintance."

"Indeed!"

"It 'll be as much work as the election, I daresay; but I mean to try both. The one should help the other."

There was a tinge of awkwardness in his laugh; and then a silence fell.

"Out with it, lad!" said the laird.

"I think you understand," replied Donald, quietly. A minute elapsed; and a minute can seem very long.

"Ye dinna mean this, my man?" said the uncle.

"I do just mean it!" answered the nephew.

"But ye canna get her! She's keeping on wi' her engagement."

"It's put off for another year. She'll never marry Mr. Thomson now, you'll see."

"I dinna want her to. But there's the minister; and if he canna fight ye for her, I'll take his part and do't, ye loon. *You* to come and bowl everybody out! Stick to your election and see ye get that. It's enough for ye."

He sat square, a wistful hardness on his face, and considered his nephew with some anxiety. Young men can surprise one so! Mr. Rattray failed to remember that sometimes it is the elders who do the surprising things. As for Donald, a queer smile glimmered about his eyes and mouth.

"I don't see the fun of letting the minister fall heir to Miss Lauder's affections," he said. "It's far and away the best thing I can do for myself; and what's more——"

"It's not a fair thing to do! I'll be no party to it. Look ye here, now!" The laird rose to his feet; he made Donald rise too and face him "plumb," as he said. "Look ye here, now! I'm not just what I ought to be; I ken as much. And things are some confused and through-other; no' what *they* ought to be. But you and me must on no account ravel them any more, my man, to suit werselves. Mind that!"

"Certainly not! What I propose to do will make everything as simple as drinking buttermilk. It's the best thing for all parties."

"Well, you'll never manage it, so I needna trouble my head," said the laird. He went towards the door. "Will ye come out to dinner this evening and bring your agent?"

"Yes, thanks, I will. You haven't seen that packman who's going his rounds about Kilpirn and Whitehouses, have you?"

Mr. Rattray was at the door, a wide-built elderly

figure with an air of responsibility touched by impatience. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, he was at the next factory to yours on the Coast, and he seems to have got it into his head that he knows something about your partner, Jones. He called in here one day and hinted and minted of what he could tell. It might be as well for you to see him. A travelling draper, whose mother used to be a servant in Kilpirn, alongside Mrs. Campbell——"

Mr. Rattray was standing, half turned to go, half turned to stay. The somewhat displeased look which had settled on his face during their talk about Donald's matrimonial possibilities became pronounced. His features tightened in a curious and not attractive way.

"Did you say that I would see him?" he asked, with a sharpness which had never been heard in his voice since he came to Ashludie. One could fancy the crack of a whip in it.

"Not I! My notion is to see nothing of him at all. He thinks that he could make some people sit up. I told him he'd better give his mind to pushing his own business and leave other folk to mind theirs."

"Good enough advice," said Mr. Rattray, in another tone. Was it unconcerned or abstracted? Did he not care, or was he turning something over? "Good enough advice. He'd better take it."

"I'm not sure if he will, though. He's a queer

loon. Something like the elephant child who went to see what the crocodile had for dinner."

Mr. Rattray was not acquainted with the "elephant child," and had to be told of his "satiable curiosity" and his adventures by the greasy Limpopo River. He laughed rather grimly and seemed to be still pondering something.

"Well, that's him," said D. H., and gave a description of the packman. "You haven't met in with him anywhere about?"

"Not so far as I'm aware."

"Well, there's no need to see him. He's just a tallyman with two big lugs. I thought I'd tell you, that's all."

"Just so," said James Rattray, and moved away. Donald came after him with a last remark.

"Perhaps you'd like to have the tallyman spanked? I daresay I could find a chance to do it."

"Na, na! Dinna meddle with the lad. If he wants me he knows where to find me." And the laird went down "the close"—very properly so-called—to the street. D. H., returning to his den, sat a good while on the edge of the table, thinking, muttering to himself, making vague notes on paper, and still thinking—hard. Then he took his chair and wrote a letter to Lauder Graham—a long, careful, lively letter.

"She'll never marry John Thomson now," he repeated to himself, as he closed the envelope.

"And if the minister seeks her he's a bolder chap, and I must say a dafter one, than I take him to be. Now here's one"—Donald's eyes seemed to search for a mirror in which to contemplate a possible Minister of State—"here's one can give her plenty fun for her money."

He laughed and clapped the letter on the table. "Why, it's beautiful! It suits to a turn. Nothing could be better—for all parties. We must have her home for the election, and then——"

He betook himself to the post-office and to the agent who was necessary.

* * * * *

James Rattray also was repeating to himself, or, rather, hearing over and over again in his ear, the phrase about something being best for all parties. It jangled like a bell. Is it not better, always, to think of everybody; not of one only, or two, but of all the persons who may be concerned in a matter? The sentence had a crisp decision and ring of justice about it. Best for *all* parties. What could be better, more true, more honest than that?

The laird had gone into town full of pride and pleasure. He was not so happy when he came out again to Ashludie. The "best for all parties" bothered him. It seemed quite easy to settle, and yet he had to keep on debating it with himself. This day of March ought to have been a great day and a high with him. He had

reached the very height of his dream; nay, over it and beyond. In everything he prospered: estate and place in the world, heirs of his own to do him credit, interests in life beyond anything he ever pictured to himself. How well, how more than well, it all was with him! And still, as he rode out to Whitehouses and walked across the strath over his own property, his success wore the look of a problem which he could not solve. Had he paid the price yet, or was some instalment falling due which no lawyer would seek from him, only his own conscience? It is not always easy to pay the price of estates and honours. Rattray had been suspecting this of late; he began to know it. Like Miss Moray, too, he had a taste for managing, and the subtle temptation of shaping other people's lives for them—never so strong as when it runs current with our own convenience—pressed on him as he looked to the old Tower on the hillside where his heart was fixed, and then to the wayside kirk and manse where a young man ate his own soul in hunger. "Let's see how they make it out," said Rattray to himself. "They" included a girl with a fresh proud face, who was now in Germany, under the wing of an old schoolmistress, pretending to teach, while she scared the governess and demoralised the pupils with treats and bluff rebellions. The laird did not know this; nor would he have cared if he had known. Let her stay till she had made up her

mind. Then let her return and settle down, and other folks go their own way with their own plans.

"Make up her mind," "settle down." What was he thinking about? It was just from this that Lauder had run away; from this that she was staying away. One who knew her well might have wondered what could bring her back.

Very quiet were the bare, hedgeless fields, very calm and lonely the great flanks of hill folding over one another to some country beyond. The laird stepped weightily and with deliberation along the road, his thoughts turning from Miss Moray to the manse, from Donald to Ina and Lauder. Donald had suddenly put himself at the centre of the problem that exercised the older man. And D. H. was not easy to deal with.

"But I'll sort him, if he pushes o'er far. I'll make my will and——"

With that word something checked him. He stood still on the road, just in crossing to his own gate. A new thought, not over agreeable, but very penetrating, had shot into his mind. How did he never see it before? And had Donald seen it? No doubt he had! He was "gleg," the fellow, and his uncle, it would seem, was not gleg at all, not near so good as he fancied himself at putting two and two together. "*How* did I never think of that?" said James Rattray aloud in the middle of the highway. He paid respect to D. H.'s intelligence, and even allowed that he had as much

right as any one else to take his own way and make the best he could of the world. "We've a' done it—Miss Moray, and me, and now this young ane. And it's just possible he may prove the best hand at the game. But now, there's one thing I maun on *no* account allow to happen. The rest's a tangle, but that's plain. And to think that I might have gone and made my will and never taken it into consideration!"

He glanced up the road, and near about where he had first seen it was the long-legged, slim figure of the young minister, devouring the highway with rapid steps, as usual, or rather more than usual. Renwick was tearing about his little world just now, and finding it much too limited. He wanted a bigger garden; though, indeed, three-quarters of an acre can keep a man busy. He wanted a parish full of streets, with no Ashludie in it. He wanted a kirk in which the pews were farther off and the faces less distinct and watchful. There were times when he thought he wanted no kirk at all, but only the veldt or the ocean. And he did not care to meet Mr. Rattray because the man would talk about Lauder Graham.

"What sent you this way just now?" said the laird, as the rapid steps halted beside him. "I was thinking about ye. But I really dinna ken whether I want to see ye or not."

Hugh Renwick did not say that his opinion was more decided. He only shook hands.

"You ministers 'll be often asked for advice, nae doubt?" continued the laird, with peering gaze out of a large flabby face.

"Sometimes. The advice is more often asked for than taken," said the other.

"Um!" Mr. Rattray flushed slightly. "Well, I'll not send for ye, then, till I'm ready to do as ye bid me. Eh?"

Hugh smiled slightly. There was something about the laird which he could not resist. But the smile was rather a tired one—even more than tired. By the strain in his own mind the older man read something fresh and painful in the other's experience.

"What are ye doing to yourself nowadays?" he demanded. "What flesh ye had is wearin' off your bones, man! She'll no' ken ye when she comes back."

A splendid colour filled the young man's face; a touch of haughtiness gave him the look of a soldier on parade.

"There is no one but my dear old mother to care how I look, Mr. Rattray—and maybe an old shepherd up on the hill to whom the world has been very cruel."

There were tears in the dark eyes that looked over the strath. He had just come down from the cottage where pale, old-world Puritanism confronted the ever-new facts of passion, recklessness, and sin, and sat in dumb misery before them.

Passion is so strong; Nature so remorseless. What are an old shepherd and his sixty years of piety? What are his wife and her proud, simple mothering of a pretty girl? The girl thought herself sure of success as she was of beauty. Nature uncontrolled, in a man of the world, laughs at her and her old father, the elder of a wayside kirk, and at her mother, the country woman. Nature exacts her own due from the innocent and the least guilty, and goes over the hill to do the same elsewhere.

Renwick's mind was full of this; but he did not know the name of the man. If he had, he must have told the laird and sent him home to stay the words which were even then being spoken in the ears of sweet, pure Ina Rattray.

Her uncle had no suspicion. He did homage to the signs of pain, and said gently:

"You're quite mistaken."

"Mistaken? About that godly old man and his wife and their silly, miserable daughter? A minister sees and hears the sin of the world, and yet cannot save. It is very awful!"

The laird shifted his feet uneasily.

"Aye, aye. We're a' something in that position, whiles. We're among the sinners and among the judges, and dinna ken how to save wersels or any other body. It's terrible queer. But when I said ye were mistaken I was thinking o'—o' your mother. There's some one else, forby her, who cares about ye."

Silence. Renwick's eyes were far away on the

edge of the southern hills and over them; his face was very pale under the black hat.

"Ye should write to her," said the laird cunningly.

"I did—once."

The older man looked away—up the road to the corner where the glen of Kilpirn bent in between the heights.

"Well," he said slowly, hardly opening his large mouth, "well, ye may be angry with me for speaking—I can see ye are—and I may be a fule, me a bachelor, for giving directions to a young man; but if I were good at the writing, which I'm not, and a lassie had run away in a fright for fear o' me, or for fear o' hersel——"

The minister dropped his stick and picked it up. Naturally, that made his face flush. James Rattray went on without noticing.

"I'd see that she had a' the news, onyway. Ye may be sure she's wearyin' to get it, and, answer or no answer, I'd send her a' I could rake up. That's if it was me, and I could write. My niece canna tell what you can, and neither can John Thomson. Forby he's in America. That's good for you."

Renwick's face flamed again, like a boy's when you surprise him.

"There isn't much to write about—that she cares for," he murmured.

"There's where you're mistaken," returned the

laird. "Ye ken where her heart is, as well as I do."

He was saying more than he could have sworn to. The smoke of Baldragon, driven in by an easterly breeze, lay along the grey March sky. *In the city*, a voice seemed to say, *where men hive and stir, there her heart clings, for she loves life.* Yet as the laird went on, he knew that he was speaking truth.

"Tell her what Peter Campbell's doing in the gardens of Ashludie, and how Shusan looket in church last Sabbath: that's one thing." The laird's tongue was getting very Fifish. "Tell her aboot a' the folkies in the cottages here that she used to rin in and out among: the bairnies, and the puir done bodies that's kent her ever since she can remember. Then there's the shepherd up on the hill. And your mother. Does Miss Lauder not care to hear o' your mother, Mr. Renwick? Syne, if ye mak' nae impression——" He stopped and laughed with a shut-up mouth. "Ye can tell her that I'm coming to Germany to marry her mysel', for weel do I ken that she loves ilka blade o' grass and ilka drap o' dew atween Ashludie and Coire-side. And"—he stepped away as if he were only talking to himself and there was no one else—"and I wouldn't wonder but I might get her if I tried!"

The gate of the avenue clanged after the laird. This was a fine way to encourage a young man!

XXVI

TWO PROBLEMS

IT was June. The election had come and gone and Fleming Guthrie's name had not appeared in the contest. Every one knew—or guessed—or supposed they knew why, except Ina Rattray; and the laird had two problems on his mind—the one in which Lauder was concerned; the one in which Ina had a part that as yet she did not suspect. Guthrie himself moved gaily through the days, indifferent to public affairs and treating election rivalries as a joke. He was a candidate for something else than a seat in Parliament, and there was only one voter to win over, which was not ill to do; still, he had to work at it, and being at last in earnest, or, to use his own phrase, "dead on for this," he found the exertion delightful.

The other affair might come off as it liked. He took no stock in it. In view of what Ina would surely expect of him, he preferred not to have anything to do with politics, now. They would be married immediately, and travel. Ina

had no wish but his about anything She loved him; he was sure of her; and yet, to his own wonder and gratification, he became convinced that he could never tire of her, never crave for any other face or voice. He hugged himself. He had swung round to a mooring; was going to be a good boy and, at the same time, happier than ever.

Oh, Love, you are the finest amusement! Oh, Love, you are the sweetest cause to triumph in! The spring days are hard with east wind and dust for the world in general, but on the terrace of Ashludie the sun lies warm and kind; the jonquils wave their yellow caps, the blackbirds sing of all sorts of things unknown to poor human tongues, and some one says to Ina Rattray, "My dear sweetheart—my true and bonnie lassie!" and kisses her lips, her sincere lips, her dark and pleading eyes. And Ina's heart sings with the birds, dances with daffodil and cowslip.

To the editor of *The Toon* the election was everything, for the time being. He interviewed the tallyman once or twice, and decided, rather hastily, that the youth and what he had in his pack would keep. Lauder Graham had fixed herself to stay at Leipsic till the summer holidays; she also would keep. He sent her papers constantly, and gave his full attention to that which should put him at the head of the poll as member for Baldragon and also give him first place among Lauder's suitors.

And so the summer came on and the election, and the unexpected happened, as it does sometimes, when even eminent gentlemen have made forecasts. Donald Howie stood for the Labour party and the Democrats; young Pitfour as a strong local man on the Conservative side, and he polled more votes than was good for the candidate of the Liberal party, who was no other than our friend Mr. Beecham. He arrived in the war-paint of the south, which is not that of the north, and is apt to wash off in a shower of heckling. It did in his case, and when the votes were counted, lo and behold! Baldragon had chosen one of its ain, Donald Howie, the popular writer. It was the talk of all Scotland and the regions beyond—political regions—for at least a fortnight.

* * * * *

Ina's eyes were holden. This was to her the victory of the Cause; nothing else, nothing less, and she saw her lover as the most magnanimous of men. For her, June came in as a dream of a new world, like the cloud of mingling pink and white in the orchards about Kilpirn and Dunragit, like the flowing of the live greenery through the woods and along the hillsides of the strath. The Cause was about to prevail. Donald was to be a voice of the people. He was working up a new set of stories for *The Chapman*. He was going

here and there speaking. In Baldragon an assistant teacher would wait for him, of course, as Ina herself would wait, year in, year out, for one less than Donald if she had given her heart to him and if he served a great cause. And if Lauder were only 'right the world would be too beautiful for common use.

The dark eyes had a wonderful soft light in them as that summer came in. It used to make James Rattray shiver sometimes, knowing what he knew. But again he would say to himself and to Mrs. Campbell, "When they're married he maun tell her his badness, and she'll forgi'e him. If she knows now she'll give him up and break her heart."

"God breaks or binds. We maun just do the right as far as we can see it. I would take her into a room, and kneel down before the Lord, and pray Him to help her. Syne she'd trust hersel' to Him."

"Ye see, I canna do the like o' that," answered the laird.

He had come to love Ina above even Lauder herself. She was his own "lassie," and for every wakeful hour he gave at night to the ravelled skein in which the fate of Lauder hung, he gave another to his sweet, shy Highland maid and her love.

"She'll die if she finds that her red-haired carle is no' worth," he said. "She'll go as her mother did. I'll not be the one to tell her about him. He's in real earnest this time, and she'll make a man of him if it can be done."

He bound over Susan Campbell to repeat "nae tales," and the wedding was fixed for September.

But Mrs. Renwick "woke upon him" next, as he said.

"Some one must really tell hér, Mr. Rattray! She will never forgive you afterwards, when she knows what sort of man he is," said the minister's mother.

"She never will know, mum. He's another chap when he's with her. I tell you there's good in him, and——"

"There's a great deal of good in Fleming Guthrie. Every one likes him."

"Well, then, is a man never to have another chance, mum, when he wants it, when he *means* it, down to the ground? He can't have it if she hears all the stories about him."

Something in the laird's eye struck Mrs. Renwick: she knew not what to say. No woman could steel her heart against Fleming Guthrie—against true love. Does love not rule the world? The laird tried to say something like that.

"What d' ye all go by, if it's not love?" he said. "I'm a plain man, and I'm getting sair mixed up among things. If it is love, let it be love, and nae mair about it, particular when it's a person's vera life."

"It's not the whole life, even for a woman, Mr. Rattray."

"So you say, mum. But Ina wants a 'cause'

of her ain. She'll believe nothing against her man, and he'll believe in her as a saint, and he'll live up to her notion of him."

"Whiles," said Mrs. Renwick drily.

The young minister struck in. His face was pale; his voice rang out; he gave James Rattray a start.

"And if he does not? The marriage may only be one victory the more for a fellow who succeeds lightly in everything, good or bad, and scarcely knows the difference."

"You're some stern," said the laird.

"You know that Fleming Guthrie will never be received as a public man in Baldragon. He tries it on; he is liberal with his money; he is the most likeable fellow they have, with that bright way of his, and his facile humour and touch of genius. But he will fall more and more into the background as the stories about him become known."

"Then there is no chance for a sinner? Mind what ye're saying, young man!" The laird stood up; his voice rang out too. "Old stories! Are they always to be cast up, and reckoned against a chap? Then my niece is the best Christian among ye!"

Hugh Renwick and his mother wondered, but the young minister's own thoughts were strong in him.

"A man's past must be reckoned against him till he repents; and marriage is not conversion."

"What is? It's a thing I'd like to know," said the laird, more quietly. There was a singular look in his large face.

"The love of God shed abroad in the heart," answered the young minister in a low tone. "What else? That is joy; that is repentance; that gives a man his chance; that knits two lives together, and sends them on, fearlessly, into the unknown. With that they have met martyrdom, many a pair. God's own love, shed abroad in the heart. We all have our chance there."

Mrs. Renwick looked at her son, and the laird at the floor. "Go home and tell Miss Rattray the truth," urged a deep voice. "It's a terrible thing to take in hand the life of a fellow-creature."

"Aye? You should tell that to Miss Moray," answered the laird unguardedly, and went away. He hardly knew what he said.

XXVII

"YOUR NIECE, MUM"

NEXT morning the laird went to see Miss Moray. There had been a long talk with Susan Campbell first, and about twelve o'clock he stepped up to the Craig. His large, loosely shaped face had a look of malaria in it; the small eyes were almost hidden in puffy folds of flesh, the mouth clinched on something. Miss Moray, for her part, in the middle of "having the painters in," was girded for battle, with tight-drawn hair and cotton wrapper; the Carter dame all over. She remarked that the laird might have chosen a more convenient time to call on a lady who was also a business woman. He seemed not to hear her, and she stood facing him. They were a homely pair.

"Ye'll excuse me asking ye to sit down," said Miss Moray. "I'm busy with one thing and another, and my niece not at home." She was angry with the laird for "encouraging" Lauder to put off John Thomson and for that Leipsic jaunt.

"Your niece? Who may she be?" asked Mr.

Rattray, looking about for a chair. He took one, and planted himself. Miss Moray was not to know that "every bit of him shook," to use his own phrase. He sat square, a man ill, but resolute, and Miss Moray knew one thing—what he had come for that morning! Her face hardened. She took a chair also, with a half-careless, half-defiant remark, as if they were two dealers at a market, and for a few minutes they made war on each other with lowered pikes—a thrust, a retreat, a duel, with the air and look of a bargain. At last the laird broke out:

"That'll do, mum! I've telegraphed for Miss Lauder home again, as quick as she can come."

"Well, you had the cheek to send her, so I suppose you may fetch her back. But what's it for, if I may ask?"

"To give up her ain house of Ashludie to her, Miss Moray, and ask her pardon for all that's come and gone."

The laird put his hands on his knees and leaned forward, and Miss Moray sat as still as if she were made of wood, staring across the room to the window and through it to the glen. It occurred to her that she had wasted her life. And the Carters hated a bad bargain.

"Miss Moray, you and I have both something to confess. Let's stand by each other, anyway, and clear the slate. How did ye get her?"

Decidedly, Miss Moray was made of wood—

Balmore fir-wood, tight and knotty. The laird passed a hand over his brow, and his mouth was very determined.

"I had once a partner," he said. "Him and me shipped wersels to the same firm on the Coast, and went into trade on wer own account afterwards, and were just beginning to make something of it when he took fever and died. It's like a wind blowing out a candle there, Miss Moray; there's a gust and a guttering, and you're alone in the dark. He called himself Jones, but I knew his real name was Moray. 'We belong to the Morays of Balmore,' he used to say. 'It's all we have to be proud of, my father and I. If I never go back, my cousin Bella won't be sorry. She doesn't want any of us to get the old place.' I've heard him say that and laugh; but it was no business of mine, and I'd no manner of notion where 'the place' was, or that I should ever have aught to do with it. Miss Moray, there's something real awful in life, whiles!"

The woman sat on. He saw her open and close her lips. The laird's brow dropped moisture. This was worse than the worst day on the Coast.

"We weren't long together, and there was money owing to the captain that backed us up. I sent home everything belonging to him to the address in Liverpool that he used to write to, when he did write. He was a careless, happy sort of a chiel, and neither of us bothered wersels much with

correspondence. And I sent money as I had it; a fairish lot, one time or another."

The square sandy face did move a little.

"I always wondered how that auld ne'er-do-weel, living on his friends as he did, came to have money in his hands. He never let on. And you and he settled that account to suit yourselves, Mr. Rattray?"

The laird winced.

"He's gone, ma'am; I'm here. I'll account to the proper party. Will you do as much? If I've kept back part of the price, what have you been doing?"

"Bringing her up!—doing everything for her!—making her my ain! She'll have what I can leave; and I pinched my own sisters for her. Lauder is all I have now, and she doesna care a cast shoe for me."

The strong face worked. Miss Moray plaited her apron in hard folds, over and over.

"Her mother was a slip of a lassie belonging to the Culloden branch o' the Morays, as we called them. They came from the one that was killed at Colloden, ye ken, and so did Sir Alec. She was his cousin, and her mother was dead, and we took her to help in the house. Then Arthur Moray—that's your Jones—was here one time; the Tower was a favourite howff for a summer trip; and what does he do but make a kind of marriage with this lassie before we knew——"

The laird interrupted with one short stern sentence, "Marriage or no marriage?—Tell it as it was, Miss Moray."

"Well, a Scots marriage, then. Mistress Campbell was a witness, I believe. A bonnie piece of foolishness it was. He had just nothing but the Moray name and the Moray looks."

"Miss Lauder is awful like him," said the laird gently. "Just his look, and his frank, high way. I think sometimes I see him."

Miss Moray plaited away. It seemed now that she must tell the story out.

"Well, he went off to make his fortune, and we sent her to Liverpool: she wanted to go. But the old man didna look after her, and he was a widower by that time. Anyway, I was sent for when the baby came, and again, afterwards, and I had to bring it home with me and keep it. One of my sisters ran away with a music teacher a year or two before, and I just let folks think it was hers. The mother died, ye ken."

"I wonder ye didna send it to the poor-house," said the laird with a grim note in his voice. Miss Moray glanced at him.

"I was young and foolish then. I'd do anything for the Morays. And the bairn was a poor wee thing; I didna think it would live. But it throve; and syne we heard that it was an orphan——"

"Aye. Orphans are gey easy dealt with," said the grim voice again.

"And there was Sir Alec, and after him my cousin Victor. Lauder was well enough off. What would a lassie do, stepping in before men folk? And who are you that you should cast up anything against me?"

"It's true, mum. We're a pair of sinners," answered the laird humbly

"How was I to know that Sir Alec would die unmarried and that auld Jamie—her grandfather —would come in for title and estate? I tell ye, I've been more than a mother to her, and it's hard!"

She rose and turned away. The laird stood up. There was a queer catch in Miss Moray's voice, and it hurt him.

"How could I know she'd grow up to be what she is, and every one so taken with her, and me, after all my trouble, nursing and teaching and guiding, to be just an auld wife that naebody has a good word for?—It's Lauder here and Lauder there with the haill clan, and I may go to jail for aught one of ye cares!"

And now there was no mistake about it. Miss Moray was weeping, with her head on the mantelpiece.

Don't ask what the laird did. That's between him and the mistress of the Craig. He whispered something and she threw him off. He whispered something more and she listened. The painters got leave to work as they pleased, and Jeannie to "play herself." Miss Moray was occupied.

The June sun rioted outside, painting the world blue, green, white, the very keenest and rarest. The hills laughed to the sky, and the river to the hills; in the den of Ashludie every bird called Lauder's name, or something very like it; and a telegram went across the sea to Leipsic, where Lauder was treating the girls of the Fraulein's establishment. They were not the set she had been so happy with half a dozen years before, of course; but she had soon chummed with them and won their hearts while she rubbed up her German. I have never seen that city of Lauder's affection. If you have, you can think of some restaurant where she entertained those dark-haired and fair-haired German lasses and looked like a queen among them. They drove back to the school in open carriages, a wild crew, with the Fraulein and her assistant duennas in a state of protesting tolerance, for, you see, it was Mees Lauder, and the holidays drew near—and in the hall a telegram was put in the royal hands. Lauder's bright rose-flush went out: the Fraulein had to open the paper for her. It told nothing; only bade her come quickly home. "All's well, but return immediately." Lauder's clear blue eyes were full of terror. Some one was ill, some one was dying; the tragedy of Sir Alec was going to be repeated, and she would be alone. The Tower of Ashludie rose up before her, the Craig nestling in the glen, the river sweeping from city to city, the

string of quarrymen's houses ending in the barn-like meeting-house within its high wall; and through all the air of Scotland poured, clear, strong and free.

Did some one lie cold and white in the June sun? Did the old bell toll from the kirk on the green mound of Kilpirn? Ah, it is there one has one's home, there that the heart-strings are fastened! The band in the gardens of Leipsic is very fine, but the wind on a Scottish moor and the burn in a Scottish glen are worth all the rest of the world. Oh to get home quick! It was a fine ploy coming away; it's a weary trail getting back, with a fear at your heart that you have been absent too long. Is it Ina, is it Susan Campbell, is it Mrs. Renwick, or—some one else? Is it illness, or is it, perhaps, a marriage? Has auntie Bella lost her money? has John Thomson come to any trouble? Lauder begins to know, as she is carried home, whose trouble would be her own and would shake her to the quick. She will never forget that journey, and the thoughts which travelled with her. It stretched out in leagues of foreign railway, in a sharp toss on the sea, in a "hurl" to Scotland through a second summer night, with the north gleaming ahead as one drove on, and the wonderful dawn breaking over the glens of the Border country. Lauder sat beside a window all night and said her prayers with pale lips. Let what might happen, she would try to be good!

Things come back on you if you play with life; it is better to be dull than to have a horrible fear at your heart; better not to be very proud and then be ashamed to look people in the face. The girl's eyes grew hollow, the sweet strength of her face wan and timid.

Peter was on the platform at Insch. Lauder was out of the carriage and had him by the arm before he knew.

"Tell me quick!" she said. "I can't bear it one moment longer! Is it auntie Bella—or Ina—or—— Oh, be *quick*, Peter!"

Peter's long Grampian face had a queer gleam in it, like a shepherd who has a secret in store for a wandering sheep; and, withal, he was rather formal. But, plainly, he had no bad news; and Peter knew everybody. If there were anything amiss in Whitehouses or Kilpirn, from one end to the other, he would know.

"Na, na, it's nae business o' mine to tell the news. That's for Miss Bella and the laird. But I'm a proud man this day, whatever, and I wouldna go back to Balmore though they asked me.—There!"

This was awesome. What could have happened to make Peter swear fealty to Ashludie like that? Lauder looked at him, and looked again, and did not ask another question, and then they were in the train running down to Baldragon, and Whitehouses is only the second station, and her head

was out of the carriage window watching for the string of quarrymen's cottages at the first rise of the hills, for the grey pepper-pot of Ashludie above the clustering trees, for a square lump of building standing out in the strath. Were ever hills so beautiful, was ever sky so windy blue, did ever a country-side look so hamely dear?

"They're a' ready for ye at the mansion-house, and I've the waggonette waiting us. We'll be up in a crack," said Peter. His excitement and a certain air of ceremoniousness along with it were provoking. Could Ina be going to be married in a great hurry? Very likely that was it, and they might have written instead of frightening a person with "wires."

XXVIII

"MISS MORAY!"

TWO hours later some people were assembled in the old dining-room of Ashludie, beyond the stair-head parlour, and the laird was making a statement. He stood at the head of the table and the mistress of the Craig sat beside him. Her face was set hard, "to thole the bargain she'd made," as Peter said to himself. Peter and his wife were in the background, waiting on the company, as it were; the law-agent was on the laird's right, and Miss Lauder, very wearied, in one of her prettiest summer frocks, came next. There was no one else. The June sun, blazing across the long room, put out the faces on the walls: they blinked and faded before it.

The laird spoke on in a broad low voice; Bella Moray sat on; Lauder's colour went from pale to sharp red and then to ashen white; the lines of her face seemed to harden, as if a sculptor were shaping them, then and there. She looked from the laird to Miss Moray and back. Then the agent from Insch, law-agent of the Morays, he and

his firm, for three generations, confirmed all that the laird had said. "Miss Isabel Moray, of the Craig, had made a declaration, witnessed by Peter Campbell and his wife Susan, who had been in service at Ashludie as a girl. It was to the effect that Miss Isabel Moray's supposed niece, a young lady known as Lauder Graham, was the daughter, born in wedlock, of Arthur Moray, only son and heir of the late Sir James Moray, who died on the Kawa River, predeceasing his father. The title, therefore, passed to the next heir male, the present Sir Victor Moray, of Dunay-sur-Seine; but the estate, not being entailed, came in due order of succession to the said Sir Arthur Moray's only child. And the aforesaid Sir Victor Moray, present baronet, must account to Lauder Graham or Moray for his intromissions with the property. In particular, the sale of Ashludie to James Rattray, Esq., was void in law."

All this, in precise legal phraseology of Scotland, was rehearsed to those who already knew it, and the one who did not, and the brown ghosts ranging behind. And then there were two full minutes of horrid silence before Lauder's voice was heard, low and clear and keen.

"Oh, auntie Bella!" it said, "you were doing that, all the time; you knew that? Oh, auntie Bella!"

Every one rose. Susan Campbell caught her Peter by the arm. *It's an awfu' testing!* was

her thought—and his, too. *Oh, my lassie, dinna fail!* Bella Moray's face was hard, hard, and yet it shook.

"Why didn't you tell me after Sir Alec died? That was the time when I should have known. What a difference it would have made!"

It was like one of the Morays of a past time challenging a false Jacobite. There was a glint of steel in the blue eyes that flashed round the old walls.

"I should have known! I should have known! What a difference it would have made! And you only tell me now that I am—*Miss Moray.*"

Fair-haired, straight, and proud, it was written on her face, on her bearing. The laird spoke. He was very humble and tired.

"She's owned her fault, your cousin, and for me, I'm to blame, too, and we're to join hands over it and try to keep each other kind o' right for the rest o' wer lives. But you're young yet. Dinna be hard on 's. We'll give ye back all that's owing ye, to the half of my fortune, Miss Moray." And he remembered how he said that to Hugh Renwick one afternoon on the road.

"Give me back my light heart again!" cried Lauder, "and then you may keep the rest—even Ashludie! But that is what you cannot do!—Never, never!"

It seemed the last word. Her hand pressed the table: John Thomson's ring glittered in the

June sun. She turned to Susan Campbell, she put her right hand on Peter's arm as if she were dizzy.

The gaunt solemn man stooped and kissed it. "Ye're my lady," he said, "and you're the Lord's child. Dinna ye put any other god abune Him—neither the House o' Moray, though I say it mysel', nor your ain pride, my dearie—and He'll guide ye and make ye a blessing, Miss Moray."

A strange silence followed. It became long. Tears were pouring silently down the face of her who had been Miss Moray; Susan's brow was tight drawn with anxious love; James Rattray sat down and leaned on the table. Then Lauder went up to her cousin.

"Auntie Bella, we'll go home," she said; "I'm very tired. And to-morrow will be a new day."

Isabel Moray threw her arms round the girl's neck, and held her, sobbing passionately. "God forgi'e me!" was all she could say.

XXIX

LOVE AND LOSS

THE June day went over the edge of the hills in beautiful cloudless hope, and the birds called Lauder's name all night softly by the window where she slept, and cousin Bella rose early to look at the grey tower above the trees and to say a prayer in her heart while she thought of many things. She was going to have a husband with her in the Craig, and she meant to be very good to him; but there was something yet to be done to "redd up" things, and Isabel Moray was still the mistress who must manage matters, and keep everybody right. By the seven o'clock train she slipped into Baldragon to see John Thomson, who had come home from America two or three days before.

It was a bold thing to do; perhaps it was not right even; but John Thomson never told upon her. He was a good man, and loved Lauder more than she or anybody else ever suspected, and when Isabel Moray had confessed and begged his forgiveness—as indeed she might well do—

and had gone back to give Lauder her late breakfast, he sat down and wrote a long letter to the girl who had promised to marry him—a long, and a sad, and a kind letter, and Lauder cried when she read it the next day. He would never wed any one else, she knew, and for a few minutes she seemed to see what it is to be brave when your hopes are all over and you are not young any more. She felt like going into Baldragon there and then, and telling Mr. Thomson that she was very fond of him really, and just to come away to Rome at once!

That lasted about ten minutes, and then Miss Moray was out in her domains, revelling in freedom and June air, in the scent of hawthorn and the golden blaze of broom, in the keen song of blackbird and thrush, and the indescribable "air" that goes through one's soul like wine. They were all hers as long as she lived. Ashludie was hers, and the dear old den, and the quarrymen's cottages, if you please, and the Secession kirk and manse paid feu-duty to her, and she had her freedom. In another ten minutes she had positively decided that she would never marry anybody. She had got her light heart back again, and she would keep it! But where was Ina? Why did not Ina come to see her? Lauder went searching for her friend.

She came from the hill as the sun went down behind it in a soft sheen of gold on blue, like

a great missal page prepared for painting by a saint in the heavenly cloisters. Ina's face was unearthly white, her eyes dark as little moorland lochs after rain.

"Where have I been?" she said. "Let us go to the crag in the den, Lauder dear, and I will tell you. I am so glad you are to have your beautiful home and be a queen here. We have no right to it."

"But you will be at Dunragit, Ina. We shall be neighbours and friends all our lives. Everything is lovely!"

They went along the terraced path in the den, closed-linked. There was no sunset glory here, but a low talk of water over stones in a shadowy place. They came to the seat on the crag and sat there together, very close, and Lauder knew that all was not lovely for Ina.

"I shall never be at Dunragit. I always knew it was too good to be true. I was so terribly happy that I was afraid," said the Highland maid.

"Don't be afraid, Ina. We'll be two queens in our own right, you and I," said Lauder gaily.

"I'm afraid of nothing that's true and real, dear, but everything here has seemed like a dream to me; not like living in Baldragon with Donald, at all. And it's better to be over, quick."

"But what do you mean, Ina dear? You love Fleming Guthrie and he loves you," said Lauder,

wondering. And then it seemed to her that she had said something to herself with a strange meaning in it, and all her veins flushed. Other words came to her lips, and they, too, were for herself, as if Destiny spoke. "Fleming Guthrie loves your very shadow; he would do anything for you!"

"He is false!" said a low Highland voice. It held a whole volume.

"You've heard some story about him, Ina? I know he hasn't always been good. But he needs you."

"Not me; only some one to play with. He needs to be amused."

The words dropped like frost on fruit blossom, and Ina's hand was cold with it. Lauder tried to say something about mistakes. Who doesn't make mistakes? Who is clear?

"If it was a mistake! If he could come and say, and not be false, that the old man is mad, I could die for joy just here and now, and thank God for giving me such a lover for a little while. But I know now why I was always afraid. Oh, Lauder, that old shepherd!"

A clap of thunder rolling in the glen, a sudden spate in the burn bringing something down with it, would not have startled Lauder so much as these three words.

"*Ina!*" she cried, and waited.

"That old, weary, tottering man! He had crept

out of his bed while his wife was at work, to find Fleming Guthrie and tell him that God punishes sinners. He got the length of Dunragit—they say they don't know how he did it—and I had gone there to see the house, and he met us at the lodge. He was like a prophet in the Bible. I can never forget what he said. He fancied I was his daughter, and he tried to pull me away from Fleming, and said terrible things. Lauder dear——"

Lauder sat perfectly still, trembling and sick. She could only clasp the cold hand within her own.

"Then he fell, and they carried him into the lodge; and he will die there to-night. And I can *never* go in at that gate again!"

"No, you never can."

"I can never ride in his carriage through the gate of Dunragit. I should think I saw that old man every time," Ina repeated, in a voice beyond anger, beyond grief—a far-off note of a wilderness where a soul must live alone. "Besides, he must marry the girl. She came after her father, and I saw her. She is a pretty, silly thing. And her mother is broken-hearted."

"He'll not marry her," whispered another voice. "But you and I will go on our travels, dear, and come home to Ashludie by-and-by, and perhaps some day——" But no, she could not speak of hope; the sacrilege was too great.

"You and I? Nay, you have your own life now, dear. You will never know what it is to have false kisses on your lips."

Her voice broke. A horrible flush went through her. She stood up.

"I am going back to Donald and the work, and when he is married I will ask uncle to give me a little money that I may travel about and encourage the people."

"How, dear?" said Lauder, shaken, wondering. The sad finality of Ina's tone closed all argument. But in one swift flash Lauder saw Donald marching on to a rich wife and a high post and leaving Ina alone with the Cause. "Do you mean that you would go about speaking?" she asked. "*You*, Ina—so gentle and shy?"

"The singing will help," said Ina simply. "And if it is right, I can do it. You can always do what is right."

They stood together in the hollow. It was chilly; the flow of the stream had an eerie sound. What do women live for, and what is "love," as they say? Is it only a need to be amused? Lauder's thought went round and round and came back with a conviction.

"Fleming Guthrie will follow you across the world, Ina. He does love you; it's the one real thing in him; and he will make you have him at last. You may be speaking and singing in—Melbourne—in San Francisco—anywhere. He

will be there, I know he will, listening to you, hoping for you, believing in you, Ina, till——"

"He should believe in God," she answered, "as that old shepherd does. And he must marry the daughter—he must!"

It was quite right, it was finely right; but how could she say it so calmly? How could she at once pierce to that, and hold by it? She was like the people in the Bass Rock dungeon whose souls were so strong they never felt the chains of iron. Ina could make a chain for herself and go forth and wear it.

"I think you can't love him," said Lauder, suddenly and cruelly. As suddenly a belated blackbird, who had been listening intently to the low murmur from the woodland seat, gave a wild little burst of notes. "Love! love!—Lauder and love!" and stopped. Ina turned her still, sad face and looked. . . . Did she look so at Fleming Guthrie this morning? Then, indeed, he could never cease to be a haunted man.

The look broke in deep silent sobs, in a clinging together of young lips and hearts in the gloaming.

"I could let myself be cut in little pieces for Fleming Guthrie, if it would do him any good. But I can't marry him. I must never let him kiss me or hold my hand again. Oh, Lauder, he has spoiled Love!"

And Lauder knew that this was all the answer Fleming Guthrie would ever get from the one

woman to whom, at last, he gave reverence. Should Love rule—always Love, when it is real? Ina could not believe in the reality of Fleming Guthrie's love for her. She shuddered away from it as a foul pretence, and from him, though her heart broke in turning. And besides, he was not free. Old Celtic customs and ideas lay behind Ina in the Highland world to which her mother and her mother's people belonged. Her lover had wooed her falsely; he was already pledged by all that a man should hold sacred.

"He is beautiful—he is kind, and makes one so happy! Oh, Lauder, how kind and how cruel! It goes through me like burning iron! For don't you see that it's all *false*? How could he 'mean it,' as you say? He belonged to that girl on the hill. She has the right to him."

The words dropped slowly out of a wound that would never heal.

"She can do nothing for him," said Lauder. "Just a pretty, silly thing, that's what she is. He'll despise her. It's awful! Ina, I could wish that you had never known!"

"I should have known some day, and then I should have left him," said Ina quietly, with a deep catch of the breath. "It's all over, dear, but the cause of the people isn't, and I shall not be afraid of any difficulties now; they won't matter."

Lauder was silent. Ina gave herself to this work as other women give themselves to a

nunnery and "the life of religion." It was for her, in its own way, a life of religion. The beauty and the cruelty of "Love" were "over," as we say; that is, they had left a breast-pang to go with her wherever she went.

* * * * *

The burn rushed and rushed in soft, unending rapids; the blackbird began again defiantly with, "Oh, Love!—Lauder and love!"—then flew out of his ambush and up to where the summer day yet lingered. And a voice with the *lilth* of the stream in it said tenderly, "But *you*, Lauder? Do *you* love any one, dear? I think you do; and he is so true, so loyal; you could trust him from this minute till you met in eternity, though it was hundreds of years. Ah, when Love is like that!—when it has no dark secrets under a smile!"

She could not help but sob. Cheek clung to cheek, soft and dewy.

"And you are a Moray!—they told me last night. Oh, how proud I am to call you so, Miss Moray! I always thought you were not in your place. For you everything is beautiful, and I am glad. It will be something to think of when I am away."

They went back through the shadows, and on the terrace of Ashludie there was clear light—in the north a radiance pale and exquisite, where day met day beyond the hills; in the south, planet and stars above the river.

XXX

SUDDEN AND CONVINCING

ABOUT the low old door of Ashludie the air lay warm, the birds still twittered to each other sleepily, unwilling to close so golden a day. A stately young figure in a creamy white robe stood looking—listening. This fair possession was hers! What matter that she had not always known? *You might have done something very foolish*, her heart whispered to her, like a little bird in a bush. But now—but now!

"Miss Moray," said a voice from the door. She thought vaguely that the laird was calling cousin Bella, and that if there were any one young and happy to go with, it would be fine to set off for the top of Dunwhinan and see the Grampians in their midnight vigils—if there were some one to go with! "Miss Moray!" The princess turned and went to see what cousin Bella was wanted for. She looked the very spirit of the place, a creature most beautiful and dear, as she came to the door, and the pulses of a young man who

waited there leapt up and then down, staggering his brain.

"Here's the minister has an errand to the laird," said James Rattray. "What am I to say to him, if ye please? We'll need to tell him where to find the laird, Miss Moray."

The light of the north was on her face and hair—the light of a wistful, eager, pure youth in her eyes. When Lauder was like this—a fair, clear-cut, happy child—she was irresistible. James Rattray's eyes glistened within their folds; Hugh Renwick drew back a step for fear he forgot himself and did something else. Then it struck him that the laird was talking some queer nonsense.

"We'll need to tell him where to find the laird, Miss Moray."

"Never mind," said Lauder quickly, and yet she smiled.

Hugh Renwick stood bewildered in the gloom with the armour behind him. He touched a piece, and it gave out a low *ping* as on that night a year ago when the man from Africa asked him if he had "room for his feet down-by." He had not room; and he could not stand there and see that face, and not claim it from the rest of the world —provosts, M.P.s, whatever they might be. He must have burst out the next minute, but the man from Africa took his breath away by saying with quiet enjoyment:

"Ye must know, Mr. Renwick, that I'm only the factor here, now. Allow me to introduce you to the laird—Miss Moray of Ashludie!"

And then he was gone, and the world took a turn round in the gloaming; a process which, if you are conscious of it, makes you feel rather dizzy. A young man stammered an inquiry, and a voice like a bird in the shrubbery answered him:

"What does it mean? Well!—there has been a mistake somewhere; but it's put right now, and I have come home."

"Oh, you have come home!" repeated an echo from within the door. People can be very stupid when they are dizzy.

"Yes. I shall always be at Ashludie, now."

"I see!" He could scarcely see at all for the rush of one thing after another as the world spun round. "And it means——"

"That I'm the laird, as Mr. Rattray says. You'll pay your feu-duty to me, you know. Isn't it curious?"

He stepped out of the nook. His face was the whitest thing in sight. "I'll pay you what I owe you," he said; "nothing else—nothing smaller, Miss Moray."

"What you owe me? I don't understand."

How a head poised itself above a creamy robe! —If he dared to reproach her for anything; if he dared to say she had not used him well, then

he might go back to his manse. Though she lived alone all her life in Ashludie, and sewed patchwork, she would not be reproached. The Moray pride flamed in her face as she stood there on her terrace with her lands about her.

"I can't explain," he said, speaking with difficulty. "It would be to make a claim, and I have no claim at all on you—never had! How much less now!"

And the world went round through the summer night. Was the fortune of two lives going with it?

"I owe you—all the honour a man can render to one who is above him—all the loyalty he could show if it were permitted—all the care and tenderness he could give if he had the chance—all the love a man can feel—ah, you don't know how much!"

Vibrant and deep, the words fell between them.

"I shall owe you these things all my life, a hopeless debtor, unless——"

Unless a man can reach to a star and nourish it in his breast; unless a maid remembers that the heart of life is to be always paying and receiving the debt of love.

"*Unless*!" said the vibrant tones. The protecting shadow of the hills closed over the terrace; above, the sky held clear and sweet to the rim of another day. A winged creature flew past like an opportunity vanishing, and a little voice, that

seemed a tremulous bird, murmured, with a catch in it:

"I wonder how people pay a debt like that!"

"This way!" was the reply. It was sudden and convincing, as Lauder liked a thing to be.

* * * * *

And the world stood firm under their feet.

THE END.

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